

pine hill

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by [angelbeachcat](#)

Summary

Academic rivals Dream and George get stuck sharing a room for their senior year at Pine Hill Academy. Dream doesn't have time to waste arguing with George; they already do that plenty during Robotics meetings and every other situation where the two of them are forced to work together. He's got more important things, like football and college to worry about. When George begins to disappear at odd intervals, Dream finds himself more concerned than he thinks he should be.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Dream should have filled out the room request form earlier.

He can already hear Sapnap yelling at him for fucking up what could have been the sickest senior year ever. They finally qualified to live at the Ivory Towers, and Dream ruined it by being lethargic.

The Ivory Towers were hands down the best place to live out of all the boarding houses at Pine Hill Academy. There was an indoor pool, a planetarium, and a huge basement equipped to throw sick parties until the sun came up. The price tag was a bit steep, sure, but it was so, so worth it. Plus, it isn't like his parents are exactly scrambling for cash.

Sapnap even texted him to set his alarm the night before, to wake up early so he could secure his spot.

But Dream is an idiot, and signed on ten minutes after the portal opened, thinking he had plenty of time to discover all the rooms in the Ivory Towers had filled up. When Sapnap called him, thrilled he'd secured his room on the top floor, right next to the one Dream was supposed to get, Dream had the pleasure of telling him he hadn't managed to book the room.

No partying until four in the morning after football games, Dream thinks to himself bitterly. Which he's kind of entitled to, he feels, as the quarterback. Instead, he's stuck at the scholar student building: the Lighthouse.

The Lighthouse is boring, to put it nicely. It's full of kids that came to Pine Hill specifically to study and get ahead. Which isn't wrong —Dream participates in the academic culture at the school as well. But in terms of having a good time, this is the last place he thinks he should be.

And he is very grateful to be at this school in the first place, seriously. In terms of boarding schools, Pine Hill Academy was the best of the best. Nestled into a mid-sized town in southern Oregon, a few hours drive from California state. The campus was gorgeous, the school was beautiful. The other students here were studious and talented and came from backgrounds that allowed him to forge connections he wouldn't be able to elsewhere. He is aware, very much, that he is very lucky to be here.

But that doesn't mean he isn't still going to kick himself about not getting to live in the Ivory Towers.

It *still* wouldn't have been that bad if he'd managed to secure a single room, but instead he'd have to have a roommate. Dream hasn't had a roommate since ever. His parents always booked him his own large dorm room. But this year, they decided he needed to take on more personal responsibility, which is why he was supposed to book it himself. How was he supposed to know everything filled up that fast?

To make it even worse, his roommate is *George*, the kid that has it out for him since freshman year. They're on the robotics team together, and Dream will admit, George *carries* that team like his life depends on it, but he didn't have to be such a bitch about it. He thinks he's so much better than everyone, always coming into meetings with the blueprints already drawn up, leaving the rest of the team to build.

It isn't like Dream tries to hate him either. He tried inviting him and the rest of the team to parties

and games, but George didn't bother to show up once. When Dream tried to confront him about it, he got all defensive.

Dream doesn't like not liking people, but *man*, George made it hard.

George is exceptionally smart. It is no surprise he's in the Scholar's house. When Dream accepted they weren't going to be friends, he just worked harder at making sure he could make a fool out of George in every situation outside of the robotics room.

He slams open the door to Room 46B harder than he needs to. Sure enough, George is sitting on the mattress further from the door, and flinches violently at the noise. He turns his head to see Dream and rolls his eyes.

"Nice to see you too, buddy," Dream says sarcastically.

"Always a pleasure," George bites back.

Dream looks around George's side of the room, trying to appear as judgemental as possible. If they're doing this, Dream is going to make George's life hell.

George stands up, crossing his arms defensively.

"Looking for anything?"

Dream ignores him, continuing to scan his side of the room. He doesn't even know what he's trying to do, but it pisses George off so something is clearly going right.

George rolls his eyes again.

"We don't have to make this harder than it needs to be. Just stay on your side and I'll stay on mine," George says.

Dream's phone buzzes twice. It's Sapnap.

Sapnap: where are u

Sapnap: come to 31A ivory towers. the whole team is here

"Yeah, whatever. I'll be back late, but my luggage guy will be here to drop my shit off in the next hour, just let him in."

George scoffs.

"Why? I could've had plans too, y'know."

"Do you though, George?" Dream asks and George's face falls for a moment.

"Whatever. The first robotics meeting is this Thursday. Be on time," George mutters, pulling out his computer.

"Relax man, it's the first week back, we don't need to—"

“No offence Dream, but I think I’m more qualified to draw out this timeline than you are.”

There he is. Condescending, better-than-everyone George. Everything he hates wrapped up into a fun-sized idiot.

“Whatever, nerd,” Dream says, turning to leave.

He’s got more pressing matters to attend to. Like making sure Sapnap doesn’t kill him on arrival. They didn’t get a chance to see each other at all during the summer break; with Sapnap travelling around Europe with his family and Dream’s football camp starting the week he returned.

They’re going to be a whole seven minute walk away from each other, which sucks because they’ve always been in the same building since freshman year. He doesn’t know how he’ll survive. He tries to ignore the sinking feeling in his chest as he climbs up the staircase, at the fact it could have been him living here.

Ivory Towers has always been the best place on all of campus. Built on a hill, overlooking the football field. It is reserved for upperclassmen who have shown excellence in extracurricular activities, but a few people also manage to bypass those prerequisites by having their parents donate to the school.

Not Dream though. He prides himself on at least that. He’s an honours student, the quarterback of the football team, he does the robotics club and he also mentors the freshmen in music.

His hand glides along the cold banister as he thinks. It’s not that bad though. He’s just a few minutes jog away, and he can crash at Sapnap’s whenever he wants. It’s gonna be fine.

He shakes it off as he knocks on room 31A.

Sapnap flings the door open, and it hits the wall with a thud.

“Hey Sapnap, miss me?” Dream asks, grinning as he reaches forward to dap him up.

“Duh, gimme a kiss,” Sapnap laughs out, standing on his toes to grab at Dream’s shoulders.

“Ew dude, back off,” Dream gags jokingly as he shoves Sapnap away.

The rest of the team is there too, setting up the PC on Sapnap’s desk.

“Damn, you having them do all the work for you?” Dream laughs out as Nikolai waves at him, holding out the monitor cable.

“He said he’d give us all a hundred bucks if we could do it in ten minutes,” Ross, one of his other teammates, calls out to him.

“Like you need it,” Sapnap retorts.

Dream takes the time to look around at Sapnap’s room. He’s got an ungodly stack of hoodies scattered around the bed.

“Fold your laundry, you slob,” Quackity, another one of their teammates calls out to him.

“Chill!”

Dream feels himself smile subconsciously. He’s a bit upset that this is his last year experiencing this, but he represses the hell out of it as soon as he can.

He's got all of the time in the world to miss it once it's over. He's going to enjoy it while he can.

George swallows hard, trying to stop his hands from shaking as he furiously works on the keyboard, trying to fill up the team planner.

Karl texted him a few minutes ago, and he wishes he could respond, wishes he could go hangout with him right now, but he can't.

What he should've done when the wifi went out, was pull out a physical planner and write down everything, so he at least would have had it somewhere.

Instead, it's one day past the deadline to submit club proposals, the dean is pissed at him for being so goddamn unreachable during the summer, and he's pretty sure if it wasn't for the fact they hadn't lost a competition since he joined the team, he would have already been released from his position as captain.

Not to mention, Dream's fucking luggage man (what kind of high schooler needs a luggage man?) took ages to drop all his shit off. There's no way all of it is even going to just fit on Dream's side of the room, which is tough luck because George won't share.

His phone continues to buzz without a care in the world. He sighs. He's only finished up to January so far, but he desperately needs a break.

He finally picks up.

"Hi Karl."

"Finally! I'm outside your room. Open up."

George sighs, already feeling like a bad person.

"Karl, I gotta finish the—"

"The planner, yeah yeah, I know. I'll help you though, don't worry."

George climbs off his bed and makes his way to the door. When he unlocks it, Karl flings his arms around him.

"Hi Georgie, missed you!"

Karl is probably his only real friend at this school. George keeps busy with classes and work, so he doesn't always have the time to hang out. Karl is super patient and understanding, because he's in a similar position too.

"How are you, Mr. President?" George asks him, bowing down mockingly.

"All good and well, you may rise," Karl cackles, shoving him playfully in response.

Karl was the student council president this year, which was well deserved. He seriously didn't know anyone that could do a better job.

“The opening assembly shit was a bitch to set up,” Karl says, sitting down on Dream’s bed.

“Oh, that’s Dream’s—” George starts to tell him but Karl cuts him off, bouncing up and down excitedly.

“Dream is rooming with you? That’s so crazy. He’s never roomed with anyone before, I think.”

“Don’t care,” George says, returning to his laptop, typing away furiously.

“Come on George,” Karl starts. “I know the two of you have your differences, but he’s always been a really nice guy.”

“He starts shit with me for no reason! He can fuck off,” George says half absentmindedly.

“I don’t care if you sit there, he’s not gonna get mad at you. Might give me shit for it for no reason though. How’s your day been so far?”

Karl starts on how the dean shot down nearly all his ideas, and made them reorder the banners because they came in plum and not eggplant, god forbid, but then he ended up liking the plum colour better.

Eventually, George works through the planner, and lies down on his bed, glancing over and just watching Karl talk.

“Which Ivies are you applying for Georgie?” Karl asks him.

“Not sure yet. I’m not even sure what I wanna do to be honest,” George confesses.

“What about you?”

Karl goes on and on about how his dad wants him at Brown and how his mother wants him at Yale, but he really wants to attend Harvard.

“You’d do well there,” George comments offhandedly.

Karl has cracked open a window, and the air feels nice after spending so much time moving baggage around a dorm room. George scoots over so Karl can sit on his bed with him.

“The rest of our lives decided in a year. Isn’t that crazy?”

George tries to picture himself in the future doing anything. The idea of him in an office makes him feel sick. The visual of him as a starving artist doesn’t make him feel any better either.

He’s about to say something when someone, or something starts knocking frantically at the door. Karl gets up to answer it, and George tries to fix his hair.

“Hey Dream! How are you man?” He hears Karl say.

“I’m great Karl, thank you. How’re you, Mr. President?”

He even bows the same way George does and Karl laughs.

“George did the same thing,” Karl says.

Snitch.

“Did you George? I guess great minds think alike,” Dream says, grinning like he’s won the lottery.

George is too burnt out to be funny back so he just nods.

“I’m just heading out now,” Karl says, slipping on his shoes.

“Night George, night dream. Sweet dreams!”

“Oh, so you’re calling me sweet?” Dream asks, smiling with all his teeth and leaning against the doorframe as he does.

He loses his balance for a second and trips over himself. George snickers as Karl makes sure he’s okay before shutting the door.

“Haha, very funny. I’m sure you don’t have this problem because you’re very close to the Earth, so your center of gravity isn’t too hard to locate.”

George suddenly does have the energy to fight.

“Maybe if the only criticism you have of me is my height, I’m not the problem here.”

Dream ignores him for a second, turning his back to him as he takes off his sweatshirt aggressively.

“I have plenty of criticisms George, don’t you worry. We’ve got all year to go through them.”

George groaned, throwing his face into the pillow.

Great.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George slams his fist on the bathroom door.

“Dream, hurry up!”

Dream pays no mind to him, singing softly to himself as he lathers shampoo into his scalp.

“Dream! If you don’t fucking get out in thirty seconds, I’m going to break down this door and *make* you!”

Dream laughs loudly.

“*Oh no*, I’m *so* scared. Go on then, if you can even reach the handle.”

George slams his fist down on the door one more time, before deciding it isn’t worth picking a fight over this right now. He showered last night, but it would have been nice to feel fresh for the first class of the year. He changes into the white button-up shirt and dress pants as fast as he can, and sure enough, Dream comes out of the shower as soon as he’s dressed.

Bastard.

His hair is still sopping wet, and beads of water drip down his forehead.

“Your collar is soaked,” George points out.

“So is your mother when I’m done with her,” Dream retorts.

George clenches his fist and opens his mouth to say something, but he wants to get breakfast before Politics and Economics, so he decides against being childish. He grabs his blazer and his bag, making his way down the stairs and towards the cafeteria.

Karl’s classes start earlier than his do, so he’s going to have to go alone. He tries not to be so anxious about it.

It’s usually busy in the cafeteria during the first week; everyone is determined to set themselves up for success, start the year up with a good healthy lifestyle or whatever. They usually taper off after then, choosing to sleep in and drink unhealthy amounts of coffee instead.

George goes every single day for breakfast; there’s always something interesting going on, and the chefs are very nice. He also likes it because it’s quiet, gives him space to get out of his own head and do work somewhere that isn’t his room. Usually getting out of his room isn’t as big of a problem, but this year is clearly going to require some adjustments to his workspace if he plans to keep his sanity.

Dream and him have been civil so far, he has to admit. Usually they get into some screaming match quite early during the day.

He makes his way towards the buffet style counters, feeling self conscious as he walks past the table where a group of athletes are sitting, still in their track uniforms.

They're as loud as ever, laughing as they toss fistfuls of cereal at each other. It's obnoxious.

George's heart aches for a moment.

He wishes desperately sometimes, that he had the ability to let go like that, fool around and be open with people. He used to be able to with Karl and his friends, but circumstances change and he doesn't have the time anymore. He grabs a bagel, and checks his phone as he waits for his coffee.

His mother has sent him a good morning text, telling him that Tilly and Leo miss him.

He'll get on the phone with them later tonight.

When he gets to class, his teacher pulls him aside for a second. An uneasy feeling settles into his chest. This morning has been so anxiety inducing for no reason.

Okay, relax. You haven't even done anything. There's no reason you'd be in trouble.

"Everything okay Mr. Kennedy, sir? I haven't gotten myself in trouble, right?" He finds himself asking anyways.

His teacher smiles at him.

"No no, George, don't worry. The dean just told me to tell you to visit him after class, he's just got some administrative stuff he has to talk to you about."

George feels relief course through his veins.

Of course nothing is wrong - he didn't do anything wrong. It was probably just some review over the robotics proposal.

He settles back into his seat as people begin to file in. He keeps his head down; he hasn't particularly had a problem with being picked on since freshman year, but he's not taking any chances.

His teacher stands up from his desk, and presses the button underneath the smart board.

"Alright everyone - gentlemen at the back, please settle down."

His teacher introduces himself and passes out a paper copy of the syllabus. He goes over academic expectations, the consequences of being academically dishonest, and George tries his best to stay focused despite this being the millionth time he's heard it.

He wonders how his mother is doing this morning.

There is an object poking itself into George's shoulder blade. He ignores it once, then twice, then whips around to see who's bothering him. Sure enough, it's his lovely roommate.

"Hi George, miss me?" Dream whispers with a grin, spinning a pen between his index and middle finger.

George could slam his head against the desk, but is slowly becoming a master at self control. He turns back around, huffing as he adjusts his arm to write comfortably. He ignores Dream as he pokes him in the back a few more times.

"Hey, George, c'mon!"

He feels the pen trace up his shoulder blades, and slowly up his spine. He holds his ground, does his best not to twitch as Dream presses it into his back.

Then, he hears the lid of the pen snap off, and the point of the fountain pen digs into his back. He flinched forward violently, his knee knocking against the desk.

Mr. Kennedy looks away from the board and to George, who feels himself going red in embarrassment.

“Everything alright there?”

“Fine sir, sorry,” George mutters.

Dream snickers, clearly pleased with himself for not having gotten caught.

“As I was saying,” Mr. Kennedy continues, “as it always is, the senior class is responsible for hosting the school’s biannual political forum in early November. As upperclassmen, you are expected to uphold the dignity of all participants, but foster an environment where proper speech and debate can occur. Today, I will assign you your opponents.”

All eyes immediately flicker towards where Dream and George are sitting, including Mr. Kennedy's.

George feels himself go bright red even further. Okay, so maybe they had a history of getting aggressive during these things. It wasn’t their fault though; if they stopped getting paired up, there was potential for a less gruesome discussion.

They’d been a bit of a highlight since the first one they participated in, way back in freshman year. They’d already fought beforehand in robotics and Dream had been upset George was right. They took up thirty minutes going back and forth on the advantages and disadvantages of Eugenics. George didn’t even know what he was talking about, but he was so determined to be right again.

Dream had won the first time, but George settled the score against him every chance he got. They were invited back as featured speakers the next year. With time to research and absolutely everything to prove, he’d beaten Dream in his best subject.

It was always close, but someone always won; currently Dream sits with one more win than him, but he plans to change that.

A lot of people who were invited to participate in the event entered it with an agreement with their debate partner. They’d outline the conversation together and ensure all information was presented properly, and ended up leading more of a well rounded seminar.

However, George and Dream weren’t friends during the first one, and they certainly weren’t friends now. When George spoke, he went in for the kill, and Dream took no prisoners.

George already knew who his partner was going to be. In every class they had together, the teachers pushed their agenda of having them get along.

Isn’t there anything more interesting for them to do? However, to be fair, there’s only around four hundred students at this school, so good old fashioned rivalry is hard to come by.

Well, it definitely does exist outside of Dream and George, but it was a lot better for everyone to keep their heads out of it. Especially when that drama had the potential to escalate to more costly endeavours.

George wasn't stupid and the teachers definitely weren't either - he knew a lot of stuff went on in the background. Blackmail, revenge plots, things rich kids do because they have too much money and too big of an ego. He steers clear of all of that - he's grateful that he keeps to himself when he hears whispers of it in the halls.

Not that he'd say it, but he's grateful Dream doesn't involve him in all of that too.

The pen pokes into his back again and he presses his lips together as he turns to face Dream. Dream grins, putting a hand on his back, forcing him to look to the front of the class. He hears him stand, wrapping his arms around George's shoulders and leaning forward to press his weight onto him, like they're best buddies.

"What's mine and George's topic, Mr. Kennedy, sir?"

Mr. Kennedy raises his eyebrows, amused. George wants to throw Dream off him but he also doesn't want to potentially be held liable if Dream cracks his head open. He rolls his shoulders, trying to give Dream a hint, but Dream just presses down on him harder.

Asshole.

"What makes you think the two of you are getting paired up again, Dream? Especially after last year's?"

There's a smile on his face though. He walks back to his computer, typing something in.

Okay, so maybe that *one time* they went a little too far. They'd just gotten a bit loud.

"George needs a chance to settle the score before I *annihilate* him in the final one," Dream drawls, and a few of the students laugh.

It wasn't even funny, George thinks to himself.

"Woah, Dream. Sick monologue, big word. I'm impressed - how many times did you practice that one in front of the mirror?"

A few people laugh again.

"Yeah well, winners use big words, George," Dream says, leaning forward even further on him, his chin poking the top of George's head.

"You wouldn't understand that though, would you?" He whispers into George's ear, breath warm against his skin.

Gross.

As they hear a chair shift, Dream is standing up straight suddenly as Mr. Kennedy turns to the class again. He hears him get back into his seat.

"Dream, George, if you can come to an agreement-" He looks at the rest of the class and sighs, shaking his head dramatically as if it was the most preposterous thing in the world.

George cracks a smile too, but does his best to hide it. If there's no place else in the world for him, at least he always has one against Dream.

"-If the two of you can come to an agreement, I will let you choose your topic together. Deadline is tomorrow morning, figure it out."

“Yes sir, thank you for the opportunity!” George says, smiling at the teacher.

“*Yes sir, thank you for the opportunity,*” Dream mocks in a high pitched voice from behind him.

George turns around.

“It’s called respect, Dream.”

“*It’s called respect, Dream,*” Dream ridicules him again, trying to replicate his accent this time (poorly).

George decides it is best to not respond.



When he’s walking to the dean’s office after his last period, he’s shaking. He doesn’t know why, but he has a gut feeling something will go wrong. Nothing does, though.

The dean looks over his proposal with him, apologizes for being snappy with him the night before.

“I understand, with your circumstances, how there might be some difficulties. I will be more accommodating and understanding going forward,” he tells George. George smiles at him, trying his best to not look like he’s on the verge of throwing up.

When he leaves the room, he feels much better. He makes his way to the library and finishes his formative paper for government, and gets done the calculus homework for the whole week. It’s eleven o’clock, and the library is closing when he realizes he’s lost track of time.

Shoot, he missed dinner. He’s kind of hungry, but he can’t go off campus for anything (not that he would anyways) at this hour. He’ll just have to sleep it off. When he gets to his room, he knocks on the door twice.

A thud follows.

A few stomping footsteps later, Dream opens the door.

“You woke me up,” he grumbles as George walks into the room.

“It’s only eleven,” George replies.

“I have practice in the morning, idiot. Some of us-”

George doesn’t stick around for what he has to say. He goes to the bathroom and changes into a pair of sweatpants and a shirt. He splashes cold water over his face.

He looks over at Dream’s stupid toothbrush - an obnoxious yellow, or maybe green. There’s an expensive looking bottle of Chanel cologne on the edge of the counter. His head spins as he thinks of what would happen if it fell.

He edges it towards him so it has no chance of doing so.

As he makes his way back into the room, he takes his blazer off his bed and heads back into the

bathroom, with Dream grumbling at him to turn off the lights. He shakes it out. He turns it around to notice a dark black stain in the middle of the purple fabric, and the colour drains from his face.

“Dream,” he growls out, slamming his hand on the light switch.

“Yo, what’s your problem?” Dream groans.

“My problem is this,” George hisses.

He holds up the blazer. Dream sits up, rubbing his eyes.

He blinks a few times.

“Just get it dry cleaned,” he says nonchalantly, like this isn’t his fault.

“You’re paying for it, you dick,” George demands.

“Okay, Christ, is that it? Didn’t know thirty bucks was that serious. Let me sleep now, unless you have any more announcements to make.”

George feels his blood boil even hotter.

“Fuck you. I’m not asking for charity, I’m asking you to fix your mistake.”

Dream doesn’t respond.

George climbs into bed, wraps a blanket around himself as he reaches for his phone.

Mom: miss you, call when you can

Mom: worried about you, don’t overwork baby

Great. He forgot to call home and now his mother is worried and his blazer is all ruined. This is the fucking worst. He texts her back a quick goodnight, promises to call during lunch, and tries his best to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

thank you all for your kind words in the previous chapter! so happy to see people like it? I was worried that my ideas wouldn’t look as good once they were executed but I’m happy with how it’s turning out so far, hope you all are enjoying it too <3 would love to know your thoughts in the comments

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George throws his head back in frustration and covers his face with his hands.

It's fine. I can work through this.

He's been trying to get work done for the past hour, and he has no excuse to be as unproductive as he is. He hears a bird singing faintly from outside his window and sunlight filters in through the blinds. Dream is gone, so the room is quiet.

His mind is blank.

He doesn't even have a reason for the burnout, it's only been the first week of school. For some reason he can't shake the feeling of something being really wrong.

He stands up, walks up and down his section of the room a few times. He's panicking. He has work in less than an hour and he's gotten nothing done, but there's really no solution to this problem.

I'll just have to stay up late, he thinks to himself bitterly.

He hates the way this year is going already. He barely has classes with Karl, he has to interview eight people tomorrow to decide who's on the junior robotics team, and he has to contact a vendor for the team uniform, and his Calculus teacher wants him to start tutoring (which he'd be compensated for but still, it is exhausting to meet with the parents and draw out plans and sign contracts about promised grade increases, and ugh.)

Fuck it. He's not doing anything. He lies down on his bed and stares at the ceiling, trying not to think too hard. Then he watches a YouTube video about cats and sees the time. He shuts his laptop, pulls out the bag with his work uniform from under his bed, and makes his way off campus, down the street, and to Billiard's Sports Bar and Grill.

He changes in the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror. The shirt looks a little too big for him, and there's dark, purplish indentations underneath his eyes. He looks more tired than he feels, he convinces himself.

He gets to the kitchen, still running his hands down the wrinkled maroon button up to look more presentable. He always irons his uniform, but this last week has taken up too much of his energy.

"Hey George, you doing good?" Phil, the head chef greets him when he sees him.

"I'm alright, how are you?" George asks, smiling politely while turning the tap on, looking at the stack of dishes waiting for him.

He works without thinking, occasionally making conversation with Phil. He tells him about school and his personal projects, and Phil tells him to keep at it. Before he can start the next stack, Phil stops him and tells him to get ready to go up front.

There's a large order today, apparently some school team is coming in, and he's needed to man the non-alcoholic bar.

“I think it’s your school, actually,” Phil tells him. “The football team? You should say hi to your friends!”

George peeks out the windows on the door, and sure enough, the football team is sat on the large table by the television. He sees Dream tossing french fries in the air at Sapnap, who catches them in his mouth.

No way. He can’t go out there. Dream would *never* let him live it down.

“It’s game day,” Phil continues. “We usually don’t see too many people from your school for those, so hopefully if this goes well...”

“Phil, they *can’t* see me,” George says, turning to him with pleading eyes.

“George, any kids that judge you for the work you have to do are not worth having as friends,” Phil lectures.

George sighs.

“They’re not my friends Phil, and some of them-” He glances out the door window again, seeing Dream pointing to something on the screen, talking loudly, “-really don’t like me. Please, is there anything else I can do?”

Phil seems to get it now. He sighs sadly, but puts an understanding hand on George’s shoulder.

“You shouldn’t be ashamed kid, but I get it. Go clean the bathrooms.”

George has never in his life been happier to hear those words. He sneaks around the room to where they are, but the team’s eyes are glued to the TV. He’s safe.

He puts up a caution sign and starts mopping the floor. He hears the door open and his heart drops to his feet. He keeps his back to the door, lets his hair fall over his face at a last ditch attempt of disguising his identity.

“George, right? Dream’s roommate?”

The voice is only vaguely familiar. He turns and recognizes the guy as Nikolai, who sits in front of him in Calculus. He’s beefy and quite tall. He watches as Nikolai runs a hand through his hair, just staring at George.

Nikolai clears his throat. “I asked you a question, George.”

His voice is icy, business-professional. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

“Yeah, that’s me,” George says, extending a hand for Nikolai to shake.

Nikolai looks at him, glances at the mop he’s holding in his hand, and then back at George again.

George drops his hand.

“Why are you working here George?”

George swallows.

“My parents think it builds character,” he answers, trying to smile in a way that isn’t convicting.

Nikolai laughs. It's judgemental and cold. George remembers him better now - his dad works as an executive for a large automation company.

"That's cute. My parents think interning for high caliber businesses instead of some sleazy bar builds more character, but to each their own."

Nikolai smiles like it's an accomplishment that he's earned himself. His tone is condescending, and George wonders to himself what goes so terribly wrong in someone's life that makes them this obnoxious and tone deaf with people they've barely spoken to.

"Congrats. Go jack yourself off somewhere else," George mutters, face burning as he continues to mop.

He didn't mean for Nikolai to hear him but he does.

"Christ, I didn't think you were actually such a bitch, but I guess Dream was right," Nikolai sneers.

"I don't know what you want me to do here, Nikolai. I'm happy for you and whatever you're doing," George says.

He surprises even himself with how smooth his voice sounds.

"I know your family is poor," Nikolai calls at him.

George freezes on the spot.

"I know George, don't even try to deny it. I heard you talking to your mother on the phone at breakfast that Thursday. Promising her your scholarship would be okay," Nikolai continues.

George wants to shut his eyes and disappear forever.

"-And I asked myself, who needs a scholarship to be here? Most of us don't- we work for them because it looks good, or we want to live in the Lighthouse. None of our parents care past the title."

George turns to face him, keeps his expression cool.

"Maybe it's just not that deep," he attempts to justify, but the damage is done.

Nikolai knows, and if he's learnt anything about this school in his time here, it is that people are unforgiving when it comes to feeling challenged, heartless when it comes to compassion.

"No George, that wasn't it. That wasn't it at all, because-"

He pauses, looks George's uniform up and down.

"-Because otherwise, you would have no problem with everyone else seeing that you work here. But you kept it a secret. You tried to sneak past the table. Not that *mummy, mummy don't worry okay, when I finish school we won't have to worry about all of this anymore. I'll get us out of this mummy. My next pay check comes in two days mummy, go get groceries, don't worry about pocket money-*"

George pushes Nikolai. It's a stupid, stupid idea - Nikolai towers over him, and he's built much stronger. He immediately regrets it, seeing how Nikolai doesn't as much as flinch, but glowers down at him.

“Let me finish, George. Or I can go out there and let everyone know, and then see how that goes.”

“Why? Nobody cares about all that,” George sputters out, but even he knows he’s lying.

“You already don’t have any friends. You think people will like you once they find out you’ve been walking around acting like you’re better than everyone else-”

“I don’t think that!” George exclaims loudly, and Nikolai shoves him backwards.

“Shut up, or I *will* go out there, tell everyone, and then you can see for yourself how much less people will like you.”

George knows this isn’t how it will go. Sure, there might be a few judgemental people that make fun of him, but it isn’t going to be that bad. Right?

He just doesn’t think it’s anyone’s business. Nobody is entitled to know what his family’s financial status is - it doesn’t imply anything about him as a person.

He is afraid though.

There’s a tiny part of him that’s ashamed - not of his parents, but of the fact he can’t do as much as the other kids during the summer, doesn’t have the connections to get those internships, can’t afford to travel the way they do. It’s the part of him that knows that people will dangle it over his head every time he steps in a way that doesn’t make them happy.

“What do you want from me Nikolai?” He finally asks, shoulders slumping a little.

Nikolai laughs.

“Well, now that you ask...”

George wants to roll his eyes but decides against it. He doesn’t have the time to get into meaningless spat - it is better to give Nikolai what he wants and get on with it.

“I have two papers due tomorrow, for Literature,” Nikolai starts. “If you can finish those for me by tonight, I can try to forget this information.”

Is that it? George wants to ask, but he decides against it. Better not to tempt the beast. He has so much to do tonight though, if he wants to stay on schedule.

“Isn’t that academically dishonest though?” George finds himself asking, looking desperately for an out.

It is true. If he gets caught in any sort of dispute like that, he’s going to end up losing his scholarship and probably facing suspension. He doesn’t want that- his family can’t even afford to have him home.

“I’m sure nobody needs to know. I can even send you one of my previous essays so you can grow accustomed to my writing style,” Nikolai adds.

He grins down at George, beady dark eyes glittering.

“Okay. I can do that,” he finds himself saying. “And then you forget.”

Nikolai hums.

“Do you- do you need my personal email?” George asks.

“Give me your phone,” Nikolai tells him.

George hands it over and Nikolai whistles.

“Wow George- now I know why mummy and daddy are broke. Spent all their money getting you new things that they couldn’t afford anything else.”

George wants to clap back - tell him that what he said made no sense, tell him money isn’t going to buy him any functioning brain cells, but he picks his battles.

Nikolai hands his phone back to him.

“Later,” Nikolai says nonchalantly, patting George on the shoulder and heading out.

George could scream - he feels demeaned, he feels humiliated, he wants to crawl into the ground and disappear. Instead, he works at the bathroom floor tiles until Phil comes in and tells him the team left.

“Fucking hell, how are you still working?”

For some reason, having Dream in the room creates increased productivity. He’s always fidgeting, bouncing off the walls with energy in a way that drives George crazy. He channels that energy into Nikolai’s second paper on language and speech in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*.

“Some of us have shit to do and our days don’t end when we get tired of tossing around a ball,” George responds easily, still typing.

Dream huffs.

“I have other stuff I do too. You act like all I am is some idiot, but I do a lot more than you.”

Knowing he’s gotten under Dream’s skin enough for him to try to defend himself, to falter in his bothered-by-nothing-cool-guy act, motivates him to type faster.

“Oh yeah?” He asks offhandedly as he continues to type.

“Yeah George. I do music and toss around a ball, I have friends and I make the same stupid robots as you, and I’m still an honours student. What do you do outside your books?”

George doesn’t have time for another interrogation from Dream’s wounded ego. He doesn’t respond, just keeps writing the paper. He actually knows jack shit about this book - he hasn’t even read it, but he hopes the spark notes summary and his inference skills fill in the blanks good enough.

Dream shuts off his laptop.

“Hey!” George says furiously.

“I’m fucking talking to you, you don’t need to be such a dick,” Dream hisses, getting dangerously close.

“Why do you care so much what I think?” George challenges him, leaning forward.

Dream looks at him, and George looks right back. They’re so close, he can see the faded scarring near Dream’s upper right cheekbone.

“I don’t. I’m trying to help you out. You can be smart as all hell, but if you keep being a dick to people, you’ll end up nowhere,” Dream says, staring straight into his eyes.

George is seething inside.

“How dare you,” He spits out, opening his laptop back up. “You don’t know anything about me. Don’t sit here and pretend.”

Dream moves back.

“I’ve always been nice to you,” he insists. “You’re the one instigating shit all the time. Sorry you’re so unhappy with your life.”

He shuts off the lights and George follows his silhouette with his eyes, watches him climb into bed. Deep down he knows there’s truth in what Dream is saying. He doesn’t have time for introspection right now - he has to finish this paper and go to sleep.

It’s a little past twelve thirty in the morning. He has to get up at six, and Dream gets to sleep in and feel completely righteous about their confrontation.

He keeps typing. Only a hundred and fifty two words left to go.

Chapter End Notes

dark academia is my FUCKING SHIT i will burn with it
also just to clarify sapnap and nikolai are two different characters and people incase
that name choice confused anyone !

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nikolai doesn't forget.

It's stupid of George to even think that he'd honour their agreement. He's losing sleep nearly every day, doing homework for both himself and that neanderthal. He's overworking himself, he's very aware, but it's a small price to pay.

Pay for what? Your dignity? That was gone the second you took this deal, he thinks to himself bitterly as he struggles to keep his eyes open.

Dream is sitting across from him, tapping a pen with an unhinged fervor on the oak of the desk they're both sitting at. They're trying to finish the first draft of the blueprints for a competition, and they've only got three weeks until the deadline. Usually, George would complete this stage alone, but this past week has beat the life out of him. He swallows his pride and lets Dream help.

"I'm gonna go step outside for fifteen minutes," George finally decides. The incessant tapping of Dream's pen combined with how hot this room is getting is making it impossible to think. Dream nods, seemingly out of it.

When he returns, Dream is passed out on the desk.

George's heart leaps out of his chest. He rushes over and shakes Dream's shoulders, but no response. He's beginning to panic. He reaches over to grab his water bottle, and pours a little bit into his palm. He uses his dry hand to move the brainstorming papers out of the way and applies the wet hand to Dream's cheek firmly. He's mildly alarmed at how warm his skin feels.

Dream's eyes flutter open. He croaks out a noise of confusion as he looks around the room.

"Oh, my bad," he finally says.

"My bad?" George asks him furiously. "I thought you died!"

Dream winces at how loud he's being and George tries to at least look sympathetic.

"Just passed out a little, no biggie. Let's keep going," Dream insists, and George shakes his head.

"No, I don't think so," he says, pushing Dream's chair back with his leg and standing in between the table and him.

Dream raises his eyebrows challengingly. "Since when is this your problem?"

George ignores him and tries to mask a yawn.

"Since you're on *my* robotics team, and I'm your captain, and I need you to not be dying, what I say goes."

Dream grins lazily, leaning back in his chair as he props a foot up on the table right next to where George is standing.

"Oh? You're my *captain*? Tell me what to do then," Dream puts both his hands behind his head

and shifts, as if he's getting comfortable. His voice is sarcastically seductive, but he looks dazed. He closes his eyes again, a wave of nausea hitting him.

He hears George shuffling around the room like he's looking for something.

"Did you go outside today?" Dream hears him ask.

"Yeah. I went running for an hour and a bit. It's nice out."

"What'd you wear? And I know *exactly* what you're going to imply next, so don't even bother."

Dream's smirk falls off his face as he huffs. "Sweatpants and a sweatshirt."

"You idiot," George hisses. "It's a hundred and eight degrees outside."

"So?" Dream asks, shifting uncomfortably in his seat. *When did he get so sweaty?*

"So you might be suffering from heat exhaustion," George says.

When he opens his eyes, George is standing next to him, his cold hand hesitantly reaching for his forehead.

He closes his eyes again, and George takes it as permission.

"Dream, seriously, you're going to have a stroke. Take off your hoodie," George urges.

"Woah, George, at least take me to dinner first," Dream says, grinning still, even when he's on the verge of collapsing.

George would slap him if he wasn't worried. Dream listens without further instruction needed, pulling the black sweatshirt over his head.

George feels his eyes instinctually drop down to Dream's chest but he forces them up, forces himself to not look and keep calm.

"Get to the bed, lie down, *don't* make any more stupid comments," George says, drawing the blinds shut.

He makes his way to the bathroom, grabbing a hand towel off the shelf. He runs the tap, waits for the water to get freezing cold before he puts it under. He squeezes out the excess water carefully.

When he enters the room again, Dream is propped up against his pillows.

"Why are you doing this?" he asks.

George doesn't answer, just grabs Dream's water bottle and hands it to him. He avoids eye contact as he unfolds the hand towel, and presses it across his chest.

"George, seriously, I'm fine man. You don't have to take care of me."

"Shut up," George says sharply. "I'm not doing this for fun, I'm doing this so I don't have to run out and find someone else to fill your spot on the team. I don't have time for that and as much as I hate to admit it, I'm probably not going to find someone with your skillset in time. Take off your pants too. You could be seriously sick, what the fuck were you thinking? And drink water."

Dream salutes sarcastically, and takes a swig from the bottle.

“Aw you think I’m talented,” Dream says, smiling up at him with droopy eyes. “I thought you hated me.”

“I do hate you,” George says defensively. “But I don’t want you dead.”

“Aw, *Georgie*,” Dream croons at him. “I feel the same way.”

“Don’t call me that. You’re such an idiot,” George says.

“Go to sleep. I’ll wake you up in an hour, and if you’re still feeling sick we’re going to the infirmary.”

Dream nods and closes his eyes to the whirring sound of the ceiling fan powering on.

He wakes up just before ten o'clock. Shit, he’s missed dinner. He wished George woke him up, he’s starving. He sits up hesitantly, feeling fatigued but not sick the same way he was that morning.

The door swings open and hits the wall, and George walks in facing backwards.

“Bye Karl!” He yells, and Dream winces at the noise.

“Sorry I couldn’t wake you up. I tried but you also seemed so out of it so I just let you,” George continues. “I got you dinner though.”

He walks over to Dream’s bedside, puts his hand on his forehead again as he hands him a paper bag with the Billiard’s logo on it. He opens it up to see a burger and a container of curly fries.

“What, that’s it?” Dream jokes, and he immediately regrets it because George wilts underneath his gaze.

“I can- I can order you something,” George stammers out.

“I’m joking, relax. Seriously though, thanks,” Dream rushes to say.

George smiles softly.

A civil moment between them that isn’t forced by school work? Dream and George? Who are they?

“Billiard’s? I didn’t know you liked watching sports,” Dream casually adds, and George freezes.

No, no way. Nikolai said, he promised he wouldn’t. What the fuck has George been doing all this extra work for?

“You gonna make fun of me?” George asks coldly, turning to face Dream better.

“What?” Dream is confused. “Why’d I make fun of you for liking sports?”

“Don’t play coy,” George snarls. “It’s frankly none of your business.”

“Okay, Christ, didn’t know you liking sports was such a fucking touchy subject!” Dream says

loudly, raising his hands up in mock surrender.

George's brow furrows for a second, and then his facial features relax.

"Wait so...?"

Dream looks at him expectantly for an answer.

George doesn't give one to him - just mumbles out an embarrassed goodnight as he turns off the lights.

Dream can't go to practice for two days, apparently. He's seething - he needs to be there, they have a game *next week* .

"What do you mean I have to sit out, coach?" he tries again, trying to get some more information as to why this is happening. "My grades are good. Everything is good!"

"It isn't about your grades, Dream, it's about your health," Coach tells him.

His health. What's wrong with his health-?

It clicks into place.

George, you bastard.

George didn't take care of him while he was sick because he decided that Dream's wellbeing was a priority all of a sudden. It was out of character and weird - he's never cared before.

George did it so he could run to the coach, tell him all about how irresponsible he was, and hurt his chances at playing. George is trying to ruin his life.

He's fuming - he needs to be in tip-top shape - recruiters from the midwest are coming to watch the first game, and a few of those schools are on his list.

"You need to rest, Dream. That was dumb as hell - running in that weather in sweats?" his coach presses.

That confirms his suspicions.

"It's never caused any issues before!" he argues, and it is the wrong thing to say because coach turns positively red at the statement.

"You do this regularly?"

Dream sighs. There's no winning here.

"No, sir. I'll be more responsible going forward," he adds.

Coach sighs. "Go home Clay. I'll see you in two days."

Great. So he got up at five in the morning for no reason. He was so excited for practice - it's nice to

see his friends, be able to have fun together after not seeing most of them during the summer. He saw Nikolai and Ross during football camp, and him and Quackity got to hang out quite frequently in July. But having everyone here, being able to fuck around, it's not an opportunity he's going to get with them again after graduation.

George took that from him. Went tattling off to administration with his tail between his legs like the coward he is, the second he saw Dream show any sign of weakness.

I'll show that motherfucker weakness.

He didn't take a key with him, so he bangs on the door aggressively until George opens it.

He looks like shit; bags under his eyes, shirt half falling off his shoulder. He also looks pissed.

"What the fuck did you wake me up for? I just got to go to bed forty five minutes ago, and now you-"

"I always knew you were fucking annoying, but I never thought you were a snitch," Dream hisses, shutting the door behind them.

He drives a finger into George's chest, forcing him to step backwards.

"Wh-what?" George's eyes widen, he looks absolutely awake now.

"You went and told, you told them I was sick so they would bench me. You *motherfucker*, George," Dream spits.

"You did this. You did this on purpose," Dream says, his tone accusatory.

He steps forward again, almost backing George into a corner.

They stand there for a moment, Dream breathing heavily as George tries to get his sleep deprived mind caught up to what is happening, unmoving. Finally, someone speaks.

"Dream, what are you talking about?"

Dream laughs. The sound is humourless and mean. It sinks in that Dream is actually mad at him - past the immature teasing and rivalry bullshit, past being annoyed at each other's presence and past not understanding each other.

This is anger. Dream looks at him like he actually hates him right now.

"You told the coach I was sick. Now I'm not allowed to practice for two days. I have a game in a week, George, recruiters are gonna be there. Fuck, do you actually hate me enough to ruin my *life*?"

George blinks up at him, almost confused and Dream wants to deck him so hard the look is wiped off his face.

"I didn't - I didn't tell anyone that you were sick, I just asked a nurse what I should do incase of heat exhaustion because I was scared you had it and I might have offhandedly mentioned a roommate but not by name..."

George trails off because nothing he's saying is making the situation better. But then he remembers Dream and his shitty self care habits and he feels something irritated burning in his chest.

“And even if I did explicitly go up to someone and tell them, that would *not* have been wrong. You passed *out* in front of me. It’s not like I dragged you to the infirmary and stuck you with a six figure bill! I was trying to help you, asshole!”

“What you were doing was trying to ruin my life,” Dream responds. “You’re too smart to believe I’ll buy the fact you suddenly care about me. I should have known better too, Anytime you feel alone George, I sincerely *hope*,” he pauses, examining the look on George’s face as he steps forward again.

George looks nervous. Dream is exhibiting an unhinged type of anger, and he’s terrified of what he might do next.

“I hope you know that *you’re* the reason nobody likes you. You’re stuck up and you think you’re the best when you’re just kind of good at one thing. There’s a million people out there, just like you. Kind of good at something assholes that will end up nowhere. Then you’ll realize that being nasty and stuck up towards people for no reason gets you nowhere, and-and you’ll regret it. You’ll regret it every single day.”

He shoves George backwards, but doesn’t expect him to go falling back as harshly as he does. Alarmed, Dream reaches out and grabs his wrist just before his head hits the wall.

Fuck, George is shaking. Dream almost feels bad, then remembers the stunt he pulled.

“I was just,” George’s voice cracks as he squirms in place.

“I was just trying to help. I didn’t know they’d bench you Dream, honestly. I’m not trying to ruin your life.”

Dream almost believes him.

“Nah,” he says finally, looking straight into George’s eyes. “I don’t think you understand. This was all fun and games until now, seeing who’s smarter or whatever. I don’t like you but I’d never try and mess up your life, but now it’s personal. You’re going to slip up, somewhere, do something, and I’m going to find out. See what happens. See what *fucking* happens then, George.”

He releases George’s hands from his grasp. He tries to ignore the guilty feeling in his stomach as he watches George lean back against the wall, trying to catch his breath. They avoid eye contact.

He feels like he went a bit too far - he didn’t think he was shoving him that hard even. He feels like he should apologize. He climbs back into bed instead, hoping to catch maybe an extra half hour of sleep before class if he’s lucky.

George feels his blood run cold. There’s no way he’s sleeping now. He makes his way outside of their room as quietly as he can, and as soon as the door shuts, he finds himself sprinting to Karl’s room.

Chapter End Notes

uh oh angst what will they do
also this story is my most bookmarked and most subscribed to already!?? that's so
crazy it's been up for less than a WEEK thank you all for reading it means the world

<3 i love writing it i'm so into developing the characters and the universe and i hope that it's been enjoyable so far :D
as always i love hearing ur thoughts and ideas in the comments so feel free to leave those ANYTIME

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George came early to European History. Nobody else is here yet, so he finds himself doodling circles absentmindedly in the margins of the page. This class was supposed to be a bird course, but so far it's just the most mentally exhausting. He doesn't know anyone here well enough to be part of a study group, and it's too late to make friends with anyone new because it's senior year and who honestly has the time?

Outside of their few shared classes, George didn't see Dream for the next six days. Dream even skipped the robotics meeting and doesn't come back to the dorm at night.

George feels like this should come as a relief; he gets the room to himself and doesn't have to worry about whatever "but now it's personal" means.

It has always been personal. Figures that it's just a game to him all this time though. George probably knows all of Dream's flaws better than anybody else; He's sensitive, can dish it out but can't take it, and careless to a fault.

George tried to extend an olive branch to him, probably preventing him from doing actual damage to his body. This is how he responds? Accusing George of being a bad person on no grounds other than the fact he mentioned to the nurse his roommate passed out? Threatening George on the basis of nothing?

He's known it since freshman year; Dream is a dick. You can tell first and foremost by the fact he has everyone refer to him with some egotistical nickname he's given himself. Who *asks* to be called Dream?

Someone that thinks too highly of themselves, that's who.

He takes what he wants when he wants, says what he pleases without understanding the weight of his words, and then expects everyone to love him just because he smiles and invites them to things. It might work on everyone else here; people used to superficial relationships, who are okay with trading in their values for some social tokens. He used to try to buy George that way too.

George has never been for sale.

"Woah, you know they sell dark black paper? You don't have to colour it in yourself," a voice above him says.

George snaps out of thoughts and finally notices that he's filled in the entire margin with ink. He turns to see a guy standing above him, hands in his pockets. He vaguely recognises him as one of the football players that are loud in the morning.

George snorts. "You don't say?"

"George right?" The guy says, sitting down next to him. "Name's Quackity. You're the robotics prodigy everyone's always going on about. And Dream's roommate."

George nods, uncertain how to react.

“Big fan, dude. Don’t know anyone else who pisses him off like that. You’ve gotta teach me,” Quackity continues, grinning at him as he shakes an iPad onto his lap.

“Just a natural, I guess,” George says quietly.

He doesn’t feel like talking about Dream.

“Krupnik teaches this class,” Quackity goes on, roughly reaching into his bag again.

When he pulls out an Apple Pencil Case, he tosses his backpack underneath the table, kicking it with his heel for good measure.

“I had him last year for Geography. Dude’s a nutcase and a genius. It’s fantastic.”

George snorts.

“I don’t even think he’s qualified to teach here,” Quackity leans in closer as more people filed into the lecture hall.

“He found out I wasn’t American and lost his *shit*. I think he hates this country, might be a spy, no joke,” Quackity leans in even closer now, like he was telling George a secret. Using his pencil, he pointed to the front of the class, where there was a clay figure of the Statue of Liberty sat on the teacher’s desk, and then to the American flag hanging above the Smartboard.

“Ten bucks that every American symbol in the room turns upside down or bursts into flames when he walks in.”

George snorts. Okay, this guy was funny.

“You think he’ll spare us? Being non-American?” George decides to quip back.

“I fucking hope so,” Quackity says, grinning at him.

“Gonna be honest dude, when I looked through the class list, I didn’t recognise a single smart person’s name there except yours. There’s a bunch of juniors in this class too, getting ahead or whatever. What *jackasses*,” Quackity goes on.

“So I was like, shit, gotta forge an alliance before someone else snatches you up. What d’you say?”

“Well you’re in luck, because I don’t know anyone in this class either,” George responds.

Quackity claps his hands in a borderline maniacal delight. “Perfect! I know Ross is in this class too, but Ross is kind of stupid, so I don’t wanna involve myself with that.”

George nods like he knows who Ross is.

“Football team. Ross is our tackle guard,” Quackity informs him.

“Lost me at tackle guard. Don’t know shit about American Football,” George admits.

“That’s perfect, because I’m getting sick of hearing about it,” Quackity says, beaming at him.

“Woah, aren’t football players supposed to like, eat, breath, sleep, football?” George asks.

“Not on the team this year,” Quackity proclaims proudly, shaking his head when George gives him a look of sympathy. “I didn’t get kicked off, don’t give me that- I just quit. Don’t have time with

more important things I'm working on. I've upgraded my position to student trainer which means I get to watch the rest of them run laps, *and* attend the games to yell at them."

"That *is* an upgrade. Lucky you. I yell at Dream for free," George retorts.

"You should charge," Quackity tells him matter of factly.

The teacher, Mr. Krupnik walks to the front of the class and demands everyone's attention. George can't help but feel elated at the prospect of sitting next to someone that doesn't treat him like an answer sheet from the very first time they talk - it's nice to be at least treated like someone's friend, even if it is out of the need for academic survival.

When ten minutes into the lesson, Krupnik knocks his hip against the desk, causing the statue of liberty model to fall to the floor and crack into two pieces, Quackity kicks his shin and mouths *I told you*.

George bites down on his knuckles, trying desperately not to laugh.

Quackity actually invites him to eat lunch together after class and George is ecstatic in the most middle school way possible.

"You got any other friends that have this lunch?" he asks George as they look through the salad bar.

George shakes his head.

"Don't talk to too many people if I'm being honest - just Karl and Wilbur, but they're both ridiculously busy with student council stuff. Planning some stuff for Halloween apparently."

Quackity snorts. "Nerd shit. Weird. Couldn't relate."

They talk - about their futures, about football, about programming. They exchange numbers before Quackity heads off to his next class.

"Was originally planning on just using you for homework answers, but you're a funny motherfucker George. It sucks that you don't talk to anyone and that you're a hermit. I'm making it my personal mission to get you some bitches," Quackity remarks matter of factly.

"I'll hold you to it," George responds, not being able to hold back a smile this time as they shake on it aggressively.

Dream is in his room. Well, their room technically. He's lying on his bed, asleep, afternoon sunlight beaming down on him like he's some sort of God. His shirt rides up his stomach, and it makes George feel flustered in a way it shouldn't.

George has come to terms with the fact that Dream is attractive - did a long time ago actually, way back in freshman year. Acknowledging your enemy is good looking is the first step to making sure you don't do something stupid like throw yourself into a fantasy where you want the both of you to

fall in love.

Lucky for him, Dream's personality creates more than enough space between the rational and delusional versions of him that no amount of anything could enable him to jump that chasm.

He can't help but circle back to "but now it's personal" because it is vague enough of a statement that George actually cannot figure out what it means.

George would be lying if he said he wasn't at least a little afraid of what that entailed because let's face it - if it came down to a physical fight, Dream would win. He's taller and trains an aggressive sport. Lucky for him, Dream has never been one to be interested in involving himself in physical altercations. The pathetic version of him is grateful for that.

He feels the need to apologize, but stops himself because he didn't do anything wrong, but he kind of gets it - when you need something to work out, and something doesn't go the way you need it to, and you find yourself irrationally upset. He's been there - he's taken it out on Dream before too.

He lies in bed too - he's got a robotics meeting in two hours, and then he has work until midnight. He usually wouldn't work that late on a weekday, but he's got a test Friday, so he knows he should get as many hours as he can out of the way early on in the week.

He wakes up to Dream standing above him, shaking his shoulder. He opens his eyes and bolts upright.

"We got robotics in fifteen minutes. Thought I'd wake you up," Dream says quietly.

George swallows and mutters out a thank you, unsure of what the correct procedure is in this situation. He feels awkward but at least Dream didn't hate him enough to get him chewed out for missing a meeting George called himself.

Dream leaves first, giving George enough time to wash his face before heading down the hall. The good thing about the Lighthouse dorms was that most of the academic clubs held their meetings here, so travel time no longer became an issue.

He gets there just two minutes early, but half the members are already here. He starts by thanking everyone for coming, then delegates logistics work.

The meeting goes smoothly, and to George's surprise, Dream doesn't cause any problems.

He dismisses everyone at the end of the meeting, and hangs back to discuss transportation options for the first competition with the teacher moderator. He sends out a few emails, feeling surprisingly good about the progress he's made. When he gets back to the dorm, Dream is staring at him intently. He chooses to ignore it.

"Where are you off to?" He asks casually.

"Just to - just doing some work, library," George sputters out in surprise.

Dream nods and pulls out his computer.

"I have some design ideas for the electric motor," Dream admits quietly. "I know you usually do those, but I think mine is quite good."

George's phone goes off.

Nikolai: Physics paper on aerodynamics due Tomorrow

Nikolai: Attached: 1 PDF

Nikolai: that's the shit I need u to cover

Nikolai: by 8 am

George swallows. "Uh yeah, just - print those for me, put them on my desk if you can. I'll take a look later."

He grabs his bag with his uniform, and makes his way to Billiard's.

-

He falls asleep while writing Nikolai's paper.

-

He wakes up at half past eight to seven messages and four missed calls.

Nikolai: where the fuck is my paper

Nikolai: dude it's due in twenty minutes

Nikolai: pick up your phone

Nikolai: pick it up right now

Nikolai: lmfaooo

Nikolai: fuck you

Nikolai: See you around.

George feels sick. Whatever the hell “see you around” means cannot be good. For a fleeting second, George doesn’t care anymore - doesn’t care if the whole world finds out he has to work, doesn’t care how they’ll make fun of him. He wants to get some rest. He wants just a moment to rest.

Dream walks out of the bathroom, tie hanging off one shoulder, shirt only halfway buttoned. He smiles at George almost mockingly.

“Hey,” he starts but George cuts him off.

“Stop, I don’t wanna fucking hear it,” he says furiously. “Just because you never could *fathom* what it’s like-”

“Okay, was just going to apologize for shoving you when you tried to bench me, fucking hell!” Dream shouts louder at him, cutting him off. “I never know what you’re talking about, so maybe provide some context before you lose your shit at me!”

George’s head is spinning. He can’t take this right now.

“I didn’t try to bench you! Get your head out of your ass for one second! Not everything I do revolves around you! Sorry I didn’t want you to fucking die because you’re too stupid to know how to dress!”

His head is spinning and all the blood in his body feels like it’s being drained out of him. He is tired, so fucking tired. He grabs Dream’s designs from his desk, crumpling the paper into a ball aggressively.

“You expect me to think-” he pauses to throw one at Dream’s chest, watches as it hits the ground.

“-Expect me to think you’re my intellectual equal when you do dumb shit like pass out and then get pissed at me for helping?! You want me to trust you with important shit when all you do is make bad decisions? Fuck you, Dream! Fuck you, and your shitty superiority complex - telling me I’m never going to be able to achieve what I want because of my attitude - why don’t you start by looking in the mirror?”

Dream doesn’t say anything, just glances down at George coolly through his lashes. His eyes narrow, and he steps closer to George.

“What’re you gonna do Dream? Hit me?” George challenges, stepping forward.

Dream doesn’t say anything, just keeps looking at him in the same condescending manner. They stand there in silence. George crosses his arms, he waits.

“When you’re in a stable frame of mind, George-” Dream pauses, not breaking eye contact as he reaches down to grab the ball of paper.

“Take a look at my design, and let me know what I need to do next.”

He walks over to George’s desk, and smooths out the crinkled sheet with both his hands.

“Have a good day. Never speak to me like that again.”

George watches, rooted to the spot as Dream leaves the room.

Chapter End Notes

@ writers who update daily what is in your water please share with the class

Quackity is here! Who else cheered

ALSO i want to start using twitter more so follow me if you'd like!! @angelbeachcat

i'll post updates there on my writing which i feel is a good way to hold me accountable

twitter scares the shit out of me but yeah try new things or whatever

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George glances around the campus. The sky's navy and golden. The football field is empty, which means the game is over and Karl and Wilbur are probably at the Ivory Towers. He checks his phone, and as always, he's told he should come, just once. It always makes George feel happy that his friends still invite him even if they know he won't go.

He texts Wilbur and tells him he has work, but maybe another time. Wilbur says Karl misses him.

He's leaving the library a little later than he anticipated. He won't admit it to himself but it's because he didn't want to risk running into Dream or Nikolai after the game. George sends a quick message to Phil that he might be a little late, apologizing profusely.

"George."

George whips his head around and sees Nikolai standing there, still in his football uniform. Exactly the person he's been avoiding, fantastic.

"Hi, uh, how was the game?" He tries asking casually, but even he knows he's wasting both of their time.

"Great. We won."

George nods, swallowing. He doesn't like this— doesn't like being on a secluded part of campus when everyone else is out. Especially when he's alone with someone that has a reason to hate him.

"You really put me in a tough spot George," Nikolai continues. "But I've decided I'm not going to tell anyone. As long as you keep doing my homework."

George sighs. "Honestly Nikolai, I don't care if you do tell someone. I'm tired. I'm not doing your homework."

Nikolai pouts sarcastically, mocking him. "So you've figured out nobody gives a fuck about you enough here to care if you're poor?"

George rolls his eyes. He's getting kind of sick of this. "Yeah. Now if you'll excuse me..."

"Too bad if administration catches word you've been doing my homework you'd be violating the terms of your scholarship. Getting caught participating in academic dishonesty can get you expelled from here and blacklisted across pretty much every school," Nikolai says, tilting his head sideways to look at him.

George's blood runs cold.

"You're so smart George, it sucks that you didn't figure this out earlier. I've got digital records, emails of you sending me my work. When I bring them to the dean..."

"But then you'll get suspended too!" George insists loudly, panicking but even he knows that they both have to abide by different standards because money talks.

"No. I can write a cheque and have all of this go away. Can you?"

George closes his eyes, tries to convince himself this is all a bad, bad dream. He's been stupid, so stupid.

"I can't do your homework the whole year Nikolai. Please. I'm so tired, and it's going to start showing up in the essays."

He doesn't want to beg, but he has no other choice. Surprisingly, Nikolai thinks for a moment.

"I'll tell you what George. How many calculus students are you tutoring this year?" His voice is soft, understanding even.

"Three, so far," he answers, looking down at his feet.

He can do this. He can play on the fact Nikolai obviously perceives himself as superior to him, try to earn enough pity that he sets him free. Rich people love charity, so Nikolai's no different. He snuffles, holding his arms around himself tightly. If he's going to do this, he's going to have to give an Oscar worthy performance.

Nikolai just looks at him. George glances up softly, sniffing in a way that looks like he's ashamed. He holds Nikolai's look, wide eyed and *please buy it, please buy it-*

Nikolai runs a hand through his hair, as if in thought. His eyes flicker to George's lips for a second.

"I'll pay you. To teach me physics and help me with english. I'll match whatever they're giving you."

George's eyes widened. He wasn't expecting that. "Really?"

Nikolai swallows hard again.

"Yeah. I've been kind of a dick. Sorry, George."

He *definitely* was not expecting that.

"I'll even do it through the tutor set-up office if it makes you feel more comfortable."

This easy? This is all he had to do?

"I just... I might need help quite often. You'll probably have to take hours off from Billiard's. But I'll pay you! For all of it."

"Is this a joke, Nikolai?" George demands, unable to stay in character any longer.

Nikolai looks taken aback, and then his eyes harden.

"Well, if you don't want-"

"No no no, I do want to. I just... Okay. Sounds good."

What the hell?

"Awesome. Cool, I'll text you."

Nikolai smiles. George doesn't trust him, but he's late to work. He'll think about it later.

Dream remembers why he was supposed to live in the Ivory Towers tonight.

The games room has been turned into a zoo; purple crepe ribbons haphazardly hung from the ceiling, golden balloons lining the dance floor. There are not enough people in this room to constitute the volume.

“Dream, you madman!” Ross slaps his hand on Dream’s shoulder as they walk in. “You’ve fucking done it!”

They won the first game of the season. Dream didn’t even know how; he blacked out during the game, just ran like his life depended on it. He can still hear the echo of the crowd from a couple hours ago in his ears; it mingles with the bass of whatever top forty song is playing right now.

He feels like he should be happier right now, but he feels let down. They only managed to clear the tie in the last few seconds, despite the fact this game should have been an easy win.

He hasn’t been training hard enough. The nerves tighten in his stomach. He should have been more ready, been at practice for those two extra days.

“I can hear your brain bitching, stop beating yourself up,” he hears Sapnap’s voice in his ear.

“A little bird told me one of the Michigan recruiters was interested in talking to you,” Sapnap continues, putting a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay man, it was a more intense game than we thought it would be.”

He sees Quackity grinning at him, and he forces himself to smile. Quackity grabs his arm, pulls him close as he raises a glass of something golden into the air.

“Dream, coming in clutch once again, but who’s surprised?”

The team cheers. Dream’s head throbs.

“You earned it man. Was a tighter game then I expected though, so don’t expect me to go easy on you guys for the next few months.”

Dream smiles, tight lipped.

“C’mon, don’t be so tight- Someone get Dream something to drink,” Nikolai calls, but Dream shakes his head.

“Nah man, not tonight. I’ll hang out though,” he says.

The team boos halfheartedly.

He imagines sleeping here every night and a small part of him is grateful that he missed the deadline. Ivory Towers management is infamous for turning a blind eye to underage drinking, as long as none of them died. Being closer to Sapnap, to everyone, is something he’d appreciate, but he sleeps over there so often it almost feels like he actually lives there. He’s still got somewhere else to go when it all gets too much, which is nice.

Things are so nice. He covers his ears with his palms, grimacing.

“Yo, turn the music down. It’s hurting Dream’s *precious* ears,” he hears Sapnap yell.

The volume drops significantly. He smiles at Sapnap, a gesture of gratitude as he walks towards the other side of the room. Sapnap sticks up his middle finger in response.

“Dream!” Karl is calling out to him, waving.

“Hey Karl,” he says, pulling Karl in for a hug.

They talk for a while; about school, the Mars rover, when they should schedule a gaming night next.

“You’re probably sick of hearing this, but you were crazy out there!”

Dream laughs. “Never too sick to take a compliment.”

Karl rolls his eyes and grabs his wrist, tugging him towards the beer pong table.

“Come watch me destroy Sapnap.”

Dream lets himself be led, standing next to Quackity.

“Dude,” Quackity tells him, shaking his shoulder frantically with one hand, a concerningly almost empty bottle of Smirnoff in the other.

“Dude,” Dream retaliates back, moving to hold Quackity up so he doesn’t topple the entire table.

Once Quackity is seated on a sofa, Dream plops down next to him.

“Met your roommate, George!”

Dream’s mood goes from mellow to sour.

“I don’t wanna talk about him,” he says.

“Why? He’s nothing like what you were saying,” Quackity presses.

Of course he isn’t - because him and Quackity don’t have a four year standing academic rivalry turned to full blown enemies storyline in the works, but he doesn’t say it.

“He’s level headed and really funny. I would actually think you’d both get along,” Quackity shifts so his feet are now propped up on Dream’s lap.

“Well he’s stupid and dumb, so no,” Dream replies, crossing his arms.

Quackity snorts.

“Okay, pissbaby. Suit yourself.”

“I’m serious Quackity. He’s fake - all nice smiles and nice gestures, and then he stabs you in the back.”

“Is this about how you’re still upset he made you miss practice?”

“Yeah!” Dream says, shoving Quackity’s legs off his lap.

“It isn’t his fault you’re a dumbass. And for your information, it wasn’t him that got you benched,

it was me,” Quackity moves his feet back onto Dream’s lap.

“I overheard him talking to the nurse, and then I told the coach you weren’t to come for two days, no questions.”

Dream’s stomach drops to his feet.

“What the fuck man?” he demands, but Quackity holds up a single finger.

“Nah, I don’t wanna hear it. You do this all the fucking time Dream, you stop taking care of yourself when you get stressed, which ironically, is when you need to be taking care of yourself!”

Dream goes quiet. He hears a glass drop to the floor and someone yell “Fuck you, Karl!”

“Whatever issue you have with him is fine, not my business. But your health, as both your student trainer—” he pauses adjusting his beanie.

“—And your friend, I will not hesitate to call you out on your bullshit and force you to take a break. Stop being stupid.”

Dream knows Quackity is right - it’s stupid how right he always is.

“Okay, I’ll take better care of myself,” he sighs.

Quackity grins, rolling off the couch and onto the floor with a thud.

“Glad we had this talk, son,” he calls from the floor.

When he gets home, George is already in bed. He tries to shut the door as quietly as he can.

When he wakes up in the morning, George is gone. He feels like he owes him an apology for the hostility and possible threat (Dream wasn’t actually going to do anything, he just wanted to put George on edge.) Especially after he technically did nurse him back to health or whatever.

He glances over at George’s desk. His designs are still in the same place they were yesterday, the paper damaged. He kind of deserved it.

Dream goes over to Sapnap’s and doesn’t knock, just barges in. He sees a leg sticking out from underneath a white comforter.

“You good?” he asks, and he receives a long groan in response.

“I was fucked up last night,” Sapnap’s hungover voice calls out to him.

“No shit. How was the cleanup?” Dream asks, walking over to turn on his TV and the PlayStation.

“There’s maids here that take care of that,” Sapnap announces, sitting up to look at Dream with a dopey smile on his face. “This is a bachelor’s paradise, Dream!”

Dream snorts. He selects GTA V.

“I don’t even remember what I did,” Sapnap continues.

“You kissed Karl,” Dream announces, and Sapnap turns deep red.

“I’m just kidding, relax,” Dream says when he notices, rolling his eyes.

“I’m gonna ask him out soon, maybe closer to Halloween,” Sapnap decides.

“Because the idea of dating you is terrifying?” Dream offers helpfully.

“Because dating me is to die for,” Sapnap corrects, climbing out of bed and towards where Dream is sitting.

“What about you Dream? Any prospects?” Sapnap asks, wiggling his eyebrows.

Dream scrunches his nose.

“No. You keep scaring them off,” he says.

“Shame. Not worth keeping around if they can’t handle me,” Sapnap decides.

“Your room is fucking huge man,” Dream groans, lying on the floor.

“You know what they say, big room, big dick.”

Sapnap lies down too. The hardwood floor feels cold through Dream’s T-Shirt.

“So I need a favour,” Sapnap says.

Dream makes a noise of acknowledgement.

“I need you to put in a good word for me with Karl. Just like, confirming.”

“I mean, I can, but you’re already closer with him than I am,” Dream says, eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

“No like... If you could, by some miracle, let’s say, get George to ask him about if he’s seeing anyone, or anything, just to confirm...”

“Bro. George hates me,” Dream says, rolling onto his stomach.

He wants to stay here forever.

“C’mon, there’s gotta be something,” Sapnap pleads, and Dream sighs.

“I’ll try but it might end worse for you.”

Sapnap cheers, thumping his fist down on the ground.

“A risk I’m willing to take!”

They've been sitting in silence for about forty minutes. George is at his desk on his computer, while Dream is brainstorming on paper. It's killing Dream if he's being honest. He likes being able to talk and riff back and forth with George. It passes time and gives him something to do.

To be honest, it is suffocating Dream right now. He feels like the guilt is eating away at him. He hates not getting along with people, or at the very least with George, not knowing exactly where they stand. George still takes this hating him thing very seriously; some sort of war waged by royals in feuding lands. Dream has always felt their relationship was more akin to two bees that liked to only drink pollen from one specific flower and unwilling to share with each other.

He glances over at George; he's typing and backspacing furiously, lip caught between teeth.

"George," he calls out softly.

George's hands stop at the keyboard.

He wants to apologize. He wants to watch the corner of the room he backed him into as he shook go up in flames. He wants to take back the intensity in his words, go back to just being spiteful armchair psychologists and passionate debate partners.

"Did you get a chance to look at my design?" he asks instead.

George turns his chair around to look at him, and fucking Christ.

George's eyes are beady and pink, the bags framing them bordering purple. His hair looks messier from the front. There's angry red dots lining the apples of his cheeks. He wants to ask if he's okay, but that seems too intimate.

"You look like you got ran over," Dream says instead.

"Taking a page out of your book," George spits back, and it's weak.

Dream doesn't have anything to say.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have gotten angry at you when you took care of me while I was sick," the words fall out of his mouth before he can stop them.

He expects George to stand up, seething. He expects to be told off, slammed against the wall, called a number of names.

Instead, George mumbles out an "it's okay," and swivels back around.

He types louder. Dream still feels bad.

Chapter End Notes

if google docs tries to correct Sapnap to Subpoena one more time I'm going to absolutely LOSE my shit. Also George using his pretty privilege good for him!!! anyways comments are so appreciated i am once again begging (slash jay)

see u all soon hope you are well :)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“This was a stupid topic. I can’t believe you chose it,” George states, crossing his arms.

“You agreed!” Dream says in response, throwing up his hands in frustration.

They’re sitting at the desk arguing again for the umpteenth time. They’ve been practicing all morning for the debate. Dream would rather get his teeth pulled out one by one than go one more round.

Since this year the debate would count for a grade, they agreed to practice going back and forth at least once every few weeks, with fake topics of course. It was Dream’s idea but he regrets suggesting it in the first place. He thought maybe if they get their frustrations out with each other ahead of time, they’ll be able to be more tame during the actual debate.

Turns out, they both always have the energy to argue.

“Let’s take a break,” Dream suggests, and George obliges happily, practically diving into his bed.

George hadn’t blown up at him yet about being wrong about him benching Dream, but he assumes he’s forgiven due to the fact they’ve fallen back into their regularly scheduled programming of occasionally picking fights and ignoring each other.

“Are you coming to the Halloween dance?” Dream asks, breaking the silence, to which George groans into the pillow in response.

“Break means I shouldn’t have to hear your voice,” he says, lifting his head to unmuffle the sound of his voice.

Dream laughs. “I assume the answer is no, because you never go anywhere.”

George rolls over onto his back. “Y’know what? Maybe I will go.”

“Oh wow, baby’s first party. Never thought it would happen. Maybe you’ll grow a single hair on your chin next,” Dream says, which George ignores.

George pulls out his phone, to see two messages from Nikolai sent seven minutes ago.

Nikolai: If you’re free from 5-7 I need help with calc

Nikolai: please

Nikolai: if you can

Nikolai: \$200 upfront cash

George wants to ask Nikolai if he’s fucking crazy. That’s half as much as he makes in a week at

Billiard's in two hours. He already knows that so many of the people here are stupid rich, but seeing figures put in front of him always stresses him out. He swallows hard, putting the phone down on his chest. He doesn't know what to make of the situation and the offer. It seems too good to be true.

Dream's phone rings twice before he picks it up.

"Hello?"

George's fingers hover over the typing bar, still conflicted. Technically it is Nikolai upholding his end of the bargain; if he quotes his job and "helps" him-

"Get purple and gold dude, they're only four hundred bucks each," Dream says into the receiver, kicking his feet up on the table.

George's stomach drops. Only four hundred? Dollars? Is he smoking crack?

"Yeah, I know, but get the red ones next month, it's fine," Dream says, throwing his head back.

The chair rocks dangerously backwards, for a moment, and George watches Dream's eyes go wide as he stabilizes himself with one arm.

"Dude, I almost fucking died!" He tells the phone again, laughing like a maniac.

He wonders what life would be like if he could be like Nikolai or Dream or the other people at this school. Tossing money like it was nobody's business on whatever he liked, whenever he liked. There are other kids like him, he knows. People that weren't born with silver spoons in their mouths, but he doesn't know who they are because they probably keep it a secret. Exactly like he does.

He texts Nikolai a quick okay, and listens to Dream hang up the phone.

"What was that all about?" he asks, expecting Dream to tell him to butt out.

"New shoes for the team. We all decided we were getting the golden ones and the purple ones but Sapnap didn't manage his budget for the month right, and he's been waiting for these red ones to drop. So he's like, should I get the red ones now and the gold ones next month? But the red ones are ugly as shit."

"Why do you need two pairs of the same shoe in different colours?" George asks, scoffing, and Dream looks at him like he's crazy.

"Home game shoes and away game shoes George, c'mon," like it's the most obvious thing in the world.

"Oh, of course, how could I have ever forgotten," George mutters out sarcastically, hating Dream just a little bit more than he usually does.

"We don't wanna look poor in comparison to the other schools in our photos," Dream defends.

"It's hard! The other schools in the private board get that shit subsidized."

George's mouth goes dry at the idea of someone's hard earned money to send their kids to private school ending up on Dream's feet as a fashion statement.

"That's a ridiculously insensitive statement. Fucking Christ, how out of touch are you?" George asks, sitting up.

“Don’t act like you’re better than me, George. You still go here too, you just spend all your money on like...computer parts or something. I don’t know.”

Anything is better than being in this room right now, George decides. Before he says something stupid or makes some heated speech about income equality for Dream to half zone out to.

His phone buzzes.

Wilbur: come to Karl’s 7:30 we are doing pizza and uno

Wilbur: this is not up for debate

Wilbur: don’t care if u have homework

George sighs, grabbing his laptop, charger and phone, tossing them into his backpack.

“That thing’s ugly,” Dream says helpfully.

It’s kind of falling apart; the blue fabric is dull and one of the zippers has been replaced with a safety pin.

“Thanks Dream. You’re always so helpful. I have to go and cut today’s debate thing short,” George finally decides to say.

“Where are you going?” Dream asks, leaning dangerously far back on the chair again.

“Out,” he says simply, slipping on his shoes and walking out the door.

Nikolai lives in the Ivory Towers at the very top. It isn’t surprising information; the Ivory Towers are stupid expensive and Nikolai is stupid rich. When he finally manages to find his room, the door with a picture of the football team pinned below the peephole, he knocks twice.

Nikolai opens the door looking mildly disheveled.

“Hey George, come in,” he says, stepping out of the doorway.

George’s eyes widen as he gets a look at the room. This has got to be a fucking joke.

There’s a flatscreen TV that takes up half the wall and a popcorn machine? Is that even allowed?

“Popcorn?” Nikolai asks, grinning at George like they’re best friends and not two people who didn’t even speak to each other a few weeks ago.

“My friends know I’m here,” George lies. “Just so you’re aware.”

Nikolai throws his hands up in mock surrender.

“S’cool. Popcorn wasn’t poisoned, just so you know.”

“You’re not paying me to be nice to you. You’re paying me to teach you math,” George reaffirms, because he is not pretending to be anyone’s friend today.

“Alright, chill out. I was just trying to be nice, don’t need to freak out,” Nikolai retorts, crossing his arms defensively.

George feels bad even though he logistically shouldn’t.

“Sorry, just, yeah,” he spits out lamely, but Nikolai shakes his head.

“Nah, I was kind of a dick to you, none taken. Speaking of which,” he says, and he walks over to his bedside table.

He opens up a drawer and pulls out a thick wad of cash and extends his hand out to George.

“For the essays you wrote me earlier. I was gonna pay you after you did the third one cause I felt kinda bad, but then like, I didn’t know how to bring it up.”

George is certain Nikolai has lost his mind.

“Are you- do you do drugs? How do you have this much cash? What?” He spits out, frantically taking a step back.

Nikolai rolls his eyes. “If you feel uncomfortable taking cash I’ll just wire it to you.”

“Yeah, and I’m sure however hundred dollars being wired into a sixteen year old’s account isn’t suspicious in the slightest.”

“It’s a little more than that. Would you prefer bitcoin?” Nikolai asks and George is tempted to grab him by the scruff of his shirt and slam his head into the floor.

“George man, there’s no catch. I just feel bad for you,” Nikolai admits and the statement sends George into another dimension of rage.

“I don’t need your fucking sympathy, I earn fine on my own. Some of us actually work hard and don’t feel entitled to other people’s money,” he says, picking up his bag.

He was right, he shouldn’t have come here to be made a fool of.

“It’s not a handout. You wrote me thirteen papers, which were all straight As. If I pay you two fifty a paper, then that gives you three thousand two fifty. And I put an extra two fifty in for emotional damage.”

George does the math in his head. Three thousand five hundred dollars in cold hard cash. That’s what he makes in three months at Billiard’s and it’s sitting in Nikolai’s stupid hands.

“You’re going to try and get me suspended,” George concludes.

“No, I just feel bad,” Nikolai says, quietly, feeling himself turn red.

“No, that’s not it at all. You were fine doing this for a month, and then now all of a sudden you want to compensate me and pay me way too much. What’s the reason Nikolai? And why do you have so much cash?”

Nikolai’s eyes close momentarily before he opens them again.

“I’m not telling you why I felt bad because you’ll laugh at me,” Nikolai defends himself.

George guffaws.

“Like how you laughed at me? For being *poor*? ”

“I’ve had a real shitty month, okay? I know it doesn’t justify it or whatever but you don’t know me,” Nikolai says coldly.

“Take the money George, it’s not a handout or whatever. You’ve earned it. And you can hate me, I don’t care. But I wanna make it right.”

George has a hundred things to say. He wants to stick it to Nikolai about how he had a thousand chances to make it right or whatever, that he couldn’t be bought over, that a shitty month in Nikolai’s life doesn’t compare to one in his.

Nikolai looks tired. George is tired too.

Instead he quietly asks Nikolai to wire half the money and that he’ll take the other half in cash. Just to make sure his parents didn’t freak out.

It’s a bonus, he tells himself. *If mom asks, I got a raise and I got a bonus.*

Tutoring Nikolai is easier than expected. They don’t discuss the dollar bills sitting in the bottom of George’s bag. They don’t discuss Nikolai excusing himself to the bathroom halfway through for a minute and returning with bloodshot eyes.

He says goodbye and swings past the cafeteria to grab the pizza for him and Karl and Wilbur.

He orders a new backpack while he waits for the order to be completed.

Dream stares at the ceiling, and tries to find new ideas for football plays in the stippling.

He can still feel his shoulder making contact with one of the defence men, nearly taking him out. The adrenaline pushed him forward, he can still hear the whistle being blown, and *Pine Hill takes the game!*

He swallows hard. His college essays are still blank, just titled *How Football Taught me Discipline*.

It’s stupid because he’s not disciplined and football didn’t teach him that and the only reason he likes it is because his friends are there. It makes him feel a bit guilty for taking up a position on the team, for being obsessive about it when his heart isn’t even there this year. He doesn’t want to write about it and he doesn’t know what else to write about and he doesn’t know where he wants to go or what he wants to do.

It’s so different - everything is so different. Talking to people, being in class, being anywhere.

His friends have noticed too - he doesn’t go to all the parties and it stresses him out because he feels like he should be. He doesn’t hit people up to wander the hallways anymore even though he knows he’ll regret it the moment he graduates.

What is Dream going to do for the rest of his life?

He convinces himself it's sports science, and then finds his heart wandering back to literature. He can play football and read books, he's allowed to like two things. It's not High School Musical.

He can go in undeclared, sure, but he isn't even sure if he wants to go to college. And he wants to play football but not seriously anymore, but he doesn't know who he'd be if he cut that part of him off.

He's not even sure what he misses. Everything is there. Nothing has gone horribly wrong in his life to catalyze the nihilistic state he exists in.

He wants to be eight years old again, asleep in his mother's arms after the Fourth of July. He wants to feel her drape a shawl over his shoulders, wants to live in that blissful haze of not knowing and being okay that comes with being a kid during summertime.

The leaves are turning orange. They will never be green again.

He thinks of calling his dad, thinks of what he'll say.

You've been excited for this your whole life. You're going to accomplish what you've worked for. Why would you be upset about something you can't change?

He wants to change everything. He wants to hurl his chair into the window and run away. He wants to steal a car and drive to Ohio and start a new life selling things at a farmer's market.

He calls Sapnap instead.

"Hey, you up?" He says, his voice cracking halfway through.

"Come over," Sapnap answers, because he already knows how Dream's voice sounds when he's on the verge of tears. It happens too frequently. Dream freaks out and needs reassurance but can't open up about what's really bothering him so he just stresses everyone that cares about him out.

Everything is happening too frequently. Everything is just happening.

Chapter End Notes

Guys straight up I cannot stop writing this also we are almost at 200 kudos holy fucking shit thank you so much it makes me so happy to see other people enjoying my writing cause honestly I don't even know what the fuck I be saying sometimes
ALSO BIG SHOUTOUT TO slutforcursive SHE IS SO NICE TO ME ON EVERY PLATFORM SENDING BIG LOVE
also whether I'm neglecting school work for this story or not is irrelevant (I'm a senior and I'm done with this shit leave me alone)
I also proofread after I publish because why would I do anything logically
Hope you're all well hope the additional insight in this chapter makes u think (or not honestly if you don't want to think don't I never think personally) ok goodbye can you tell I'm LOSING MY MIND

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Slotted screwdriver please,” Dream asks, not looking up from his workstation.

The freshman assisting him places it carefully into his hands before stepping back to give him space. Dream would laugh at how unnecessarily formal she’s being if he wasn’t so focused.

This hardwiring had been taken up days of his time and it was only nearly halfway complete. He prods at the wires with the screwdriver carefully, doing his best to separate them.

He feels someone standing directly behind him and he feels annoyed, but he tries his best not to let it get to him. He doesn’t have time to mess around; there’s a paper due in two days that he hasn’t started and football practice tomorrow morning.

When the person doesn’t leave and the feeling of being stared at gets too much, he sighs and stands up straight.

“Component E is wired incorrectly,” George’s voice says from behind him.

Dream blinks slowly. *No it isn’t.*

“No it isn’t,” he says, stepping aside so George can inspect.

George squints at the wires surrounding it, leaning in closer to take a look.

“All these wires are the same girth. Two of them should be one size up,” George insists.

“We got the thinly insulated wires this year, they’re all the same *girth*,” Dream says, unable to resist laughing at the last word.

George’s eyebrows furrow and Dream isn’t sure if he’s messing with him or not. He would rather not waste this opportunity to make George look like an idiot, so he comes up with an idea.

“Cassie,” Dream calls out to the freshman girl, motioning for her to come closer.

Her eyes widen, gaze flickering between George and Dream, but she tentatively takes a step forward. Dream is tempted to laugh again.

“Don’t worry, we won’t fight,” Dream tells her, smiling to convince the both of them. “Was just wondering if you could point out to Mr. Captain Man over here what wire sizes we used here.”

“17A and 14A,” Cassie says, watching George’s face for a reaction.

“They both look the same, how can we be sure you didn’t wire it incorrectly?” George presses.

“What are you talking about? The 17As are green and the 14As are yellow,” Dream answers.

Oh. Now he sees why this is a problem.

“I’m colourblind, idiot, how am I supposed to check this over and make sure you didn’t somehow accidentally create a bomb?” George hisses.

“Well maybe if you helped out more with the hardwiring,” Dream starts, seeing Cassie suddenly become very interested in the posters on the wall parallel from where they were standing.

“You can go Cassie, thanks for shadowing today,” George tells her with a smile, hoping to convey how sorry he was that she had to witness the beginning of their third robotics related argument of the week.

When she’s out of the workroom, he turns back to Dream.

“I *would* help with the board, but seeing as I drew up the majority of the blueprints and still have to help the juniors get their shit together, I assumed I could trust you to get this done correctly. Don’t know why, clearly I was wrong,” George voices coldly.

“Well if my work is so poor in quality, maybe you should do it,” Dream spits out, picking up the board and shoving it into George’s arms.

“Dream, take this back,” George hisses, trying furiously to keep the board wedged between the both of them.

“Too heavy for you? Didn’t know you had the strength of a toddler,” Dream scoffs, not moving.

“I can’t carry this, seriously Dream, fucking take it,” George says, his voice coming out pitched.

Dream tries to hold on a second too late, because George loses his grip on it and it crashes to the floor.

For a second they can do nothing but stare at it. George feels a sinking pit in his stomach and he wants the floor to swallow him up. There is no way they can get everything rewired and done during the next few meetings in time for the competition.

If they don’t place, he loses his scholarship.

The weight of the situation settles in and he looks to Dream for a reaction.

Dream just blankly stares at the mess.

“I’m so sorry,” Dream finally says, no trace of any emotion in his voice.

It’s all mangled, one of the parts glinting almost humorously on the vinyl floor.

“We’re fucked,” George laughs out, running a hand through his hair anxiously. “Dude, the dean is going to fucking kill us. This base cost four grand.”

George’s head spins at the figure.

They stand there in silence, trying to look for anything that somehow was intact.

They can’t even bring themselves to argue about who’s fault it is, that’s how fucked they are.

“We could redo it,” Dream finally says, kneeling down to see if there’s any salvageable parts. “I can look through and tally up a list of shit we need to buy. We’ll just stay up late doing it every night until the competition. We can...we can fix it. We can fix this.”

George nods, swallowing.

They silently pick up and bag the pieces of the board, leaving a note on the teacher’s desk that

they're taking it up to their dorm to work on it during the week.

As long as nobody else has any questions, they can get away with this. Right?

When George is teaching Nikolai how to find a derivative, his mind finds itself wandering back to how the fuck he's supposed to pay for that board.

He's already taken an indefinite leave from work for three months. Maybe he can ask for his job back? Or see if Nikolai wants help in any other subjects?

"You're still sixteen, right?" Nikolai asks.

George nods. "Isn't everyone?"

"I'm eighteen, had to take a year off after freshman year so I'm a year older than all of you," Nikolai says nonchalantly.

To be honest, he'd rather work with Nikolai than go back to Billiard's. Even though he's exhausting at times, he genuinely seems to be making an effort with his work. Not that he'd ever admit it, but they've got a semi-friendship developing.

"You coming to the Halloween dance, George?" Nikolai asks him, snapping him out of his thoughts.

"Don't know, probably not," George says, glancing over the math. "Good job, now try number seven."

"Why not?" Nikolai asks him, putting down his pencil and stretching his arms.

George shrugs. "I mean, I'd go but Karl's gonna be busy running around managing shit and Wilbur's performing, so he's gonna be busy too."

"Don't you have any other friends?" Nikolai asks him, and George shakes his head no.

"I'm like, kind of friends with Quackity, but he's got other friends," George mumbles, feeling very much like the kid in kindergarten nobody wanted to sit next to.

Nikolai works away at the next question, and George runs a finger down the grooves of the desk as he thinks.

"Do you need help with any other subjects? Or additional hours with anything?" George finds himself asking before he can overthink it.

"Not particularly," Nikolai says. "Why?"

"Just a little strapped for cash," George admits.

Nikolai's eyes narrow and he looks almost concerned. "Everything okay?"

"Oh yeah, it's nothing too urgent, seriously," George assures him, even though it is very urgent.

Nikolai looks at him expectantly. "Okay, now the truth."

George sighs. "I broke something expensive. I need to pay for it as soon as possible."

"How much?" Nikolai asks, thinking about what George is saying.

"Two grand," George whispers, hoping the volume of his voice will take away from the ridiculousness of the amount.

Nikolai doesn't as much as flinch.

"If you come to the Halloween party with me, I'll cover it," Nikolai offers.

George nearly jumps out of his chair. "What?"

Nikolai laughs. "Yeah, you need to get out more. It's a win-win for you. And don't give me your whole *oh, I don't want this to be a charity case* speech again. Me and the boys do this kind of shit all the time, and you're one of my boys now, so. I'm offering it to you. Equality, or whatever."

"What's the catch?" George presses.

"No catch. Just come to the party," Nikolai insists.

"I hope you're not like, trying to make me your private escort or anything," George laughs out, only half joking.

"If I was gay, yeah, I'd totally pick you," Nikolai says, pressing a pencil into George's cheek.

George reacts aggressively, slapping the pencil away. "Stop."

"Don't be chicken," Nikolai teases. "Unless you're actually gay."

George doesn't know how to respond to this. He's never denied the fact he's gay, but nobody has exactly upfront asked. He's also unable to deduce whether Nikolai is a raging homophobe or not, which now that he thinks about, he probably should have researched this fact more thoroughly before stepping into his dorm.

"Wait...are you actually gay?" Nikolai asks, eyes widening.

"I can...I'll go," George says, hurrying to gather his things.

"No! I don't care if you're gay. Or, congratulations," Nikolai offers.

George snorts, lowering himself back onto the chair. "Thanks."

"Sorry if I made you uncomfortable," Nikolai continues.

"Also, I'm not homophobic, if you were worried about that. I have a friend who's gay. I could set you up on a date."

"I'm okay Nikolai, thanks. If you could just keep the gay thing under wraps, it would be greatly appreciated," George mutters out, feeling embarrassed.

This confused but supportive attitude is somehow worse than homophobia. He tries to imagine Nikolai next to some twink at a pride parade, wearing a shirt that says *ally* on it as he waves a little rainbow flag. The image is so disturbing that he regrets it immediately.

“I’ll play you to go on the date,” Nikolai offers, and George groans, throwing his head back.

“I think if you do that, it actually does classify me as an escort.”

“Only if you sleep with him,” Nikolai says, grinning, and George shoves his head to the side playfully out of instinct.

Then he realizes what he did.

“Sorry,” he tries, only half meaning it and Nikolai laughs, nudging his shoulder.



Dream knows he isn’t meant to hear it, but he can’t exactly ignore it.

It’s one in the morning, and he’s supposed to be asleep, but he’s researching and taking notes on his phone for his paper, convincing himself it’s more efficient. George clearly thinks he’s asleep too, because it sounds like he’s crying in the bathroom.

It’s muffled because the door is thick and the shower is running, but occasionally a hiccuping noise manages to make its way to Dream’s ears.

George is having the worst time. He wants to go home and fall asleep in Tilly and Leo’s bed, wake up to his parents in the kitchen making tea. His room is smaller at home than it is here but he misses feeling close to people. Instead he’s here, nearly eight thousand kilometres away.

He’s never been a homesick person, but the reality of the situation is setting in. He’ll go to college, he’ll start working here, and then he’ll very rarely see his family.

He doesn’t even have the time to call too often, caught up in making sure he can stay here.

He stops the shower and wets his hands, pressing them under his eyes in hopes of not looking like a wreck.

Dream feels bad even as the crying from behind the door stops. He knows the board falling over was technically, not George’s fault. But he’s the captain, he was there, and he’d probably be the one who ended up getting heat for it.

He ordered all the parts already and they’ll arrive in two days. He’ll need to work on them for close to two hours every night if he wants to get it done a week ahead of the competition and leave them enough time to test it.

When George emerges from the bathroom, eyes puffy and cheeks flushed, he feels like he should ask if he’s okay.

He pretends he doesn’t notice instead.

When he wakes up the next morning, George is gone, his Politics and Economics textbook left by the foot of his bed. They both have that this morning, so he’ll bring it to him as some halfass attempt at an apology.

He goes to pick it up, and notices a handful of twenty dollar bills peeking out of the worn out backpack shoved between the leg of his bed and the bedside table.

He goes to fix it, adjust it so the money isn't falling out of the bag. He unzips the top zipper to do so and his heart stops.

Holy shit.

It's just cash. Like, an abnormal amount of cash. There's got to be two grand in here minimum. It's tied together with rubber bands on both ends in neat little stacks. Dream thought they only did that in movies and music videos.

This is not normal.

Dream swallows, tucking the bills in so they aren't visible, before shoving the bag back into its corner, hoping George doesn't notice it out of place. He thinks about it as he walks all the way to class.

Why would George carry cash like that? To make untraceable transactions, maybe. What could he possibly be doing? Buying illegal computer components? What else does George even like?

When he hands George his book, he looks confused for a second, before he realizes.

"You left it on your dresser and I thought you might want it," Dream says.

"Yeah, thanks," George says, offering a small smile.

Dream leans in close to whisper. "I ordered the parts for the board. They'll be here in two days."

George swallows. "Okay. I'll wire you half the money--"

Dream waves his hand absentmindedly. "Nah dude, don't worry. I shouldn't have messed around with the board."

George tilts his head at him in confusion. "I feel like you should be freaking out a lot more."

"About the board?" Dream asks.

"The board, the cost, the time frame, the everything," George clarifies.

"I am, don't worry," Dream reassures him. "It's just all internalized."

"Healthy," George says.

"Hm."

It's awkward for a moment, but Dream can't bring himself to walk away.

"Everything okay recently?" he finds himself asking.

"Uh, yeah. Why?"

"Nothing...you're just out more nowadays," Dream presses, trying to see a crack in George's resolve.

George just looks back at him like he's crazy.

“Didn’t know I needed your permission to be out,” he says.

“You don’t. Was just odd, considering you’re usually not out that much. For the three years I’ve had the pleasure to know you,” Dream tries, but George’s expression remains neutral.

“You don’t know me. You’re just not used to living with another person,” George says so matter of factly that Dream would have bought it if he didn’t know something was up.

He wants to keep going, see what he can figure out, but the professor’s at the front of the class and nearly everyone is seated.

He sighs, sits down at his desk and waits for class to start. He watches George’s hand make its way up his scalp as he plays with his hair absentmindedly. His shoulders shift, creasing his blazer for a moment before it smoothes out over his back again, ironed to perfection.

Oh George. What are you hiding?

Chapter End Notes

how are we at 250 kudos already holy shit. wow??

not to make this a numbers game in the slightest tbh but i cannot lie watching the numbers go up is extremely fun for me

how is everyone this fine week? i am doing alright if i do say so myself - been writing a lot, and finally caught up on all my school work so that's fantastic

i fully use the end notes as a diary/emotional dump my sincerest apologies but has anyone else been feeling in extremes as of lately lol i either feel at the top of the world or like nothing matters in the slightest or is it just me

plotline heating up!! if anyone saw me earlier put in a tentative 27 chapter goal and is now confused as to why it is gone it is because i have no idea. i originally had it planned for that many but i have new ideas for chapters that i wrote in plus i don't wanna rush it or put pressure on myself to cut it off at a certain point so that's GONE but i will give a tentative idea of how much longer i expect the story to be once we hit a little over 20 chapters incase anyone likes to know ahead of time :)

as always comments are so so appreciated - light of my life right now (shamelessly, i am once again begging. i have no pride) and it also really lets me know where u guys are at and what you're thinking or if what im saying makes sense :) see u all soon!!!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Are you joking? I’m not doing this.”

“George, please, come on dude. I’ll literally pay you!”

“No.”

“Come on, don’t be like that. I’m doing something good for you!”

George whirls his chair around from the desk to face Nikolai. They finished studying twenty minutes ago, and George wanted to go home, but Nikolai insisted on him staying. It was closer to get to the library from the Ivory Towers anyways, so he agreed. If he knew this would be the discussion, he wouldn’t have.

He’s sure Nikolai’s friend is very nice, but he just does not have the time to date right now. It didn’t even make sense to get romantically involved with anyone in senior year.

“Why are you doing this? Why do you care?” George asks again, exasperated.

“I just think you’d have fun! He’s like, a great fit for you,” Nikolai defends.

“Oh yeah? What about us seems like it fits together so well? Despite the fact we’re both gay?” George asks, crossing his arms.

“He’s into golf,” Nikolai offers.

“I don’t play golf.”

“Well if you did, I’m sure you’d enjoy it. You seem like a golf guy.”

George groans, throwing his head back. Nikolai opens his mouth to continue arguing his case, but his phone rings.

“It’s my dad, I gotta pick up, but this conversation is *not* over.”

Nikolai has got to be the oddest character George has ever met at this school. Everyone else was quite predictable. Take Dream, for example.

Whenever George said something Dream didn’t like, he’d either respond in a condescending or overtly sexual way, in some sorry attempt to make George uncomfortable. Whenever he got frustrated, he’d run his thumb across his fingernails, and on the rare occasion he had something intelligent to add, he’d tap his pen on the desk in anticipation.

Not that George has wired himself to understand all of Dream’s mannerisms by choice, but he’s picked up on his tells over the years. He’s had to, in order to determine his next move and beat him to it. For organized debate, of course, and not meaningless argument purposes.

To Dream’s credit though, he’s recently been very focused on getting that board done. He helps occasionally, but Dream has taken charge. Not that he’d tell him, but he’s grateful. It takes a lot off his plate while he tries to manage the junior team, who are in shambles.

“Yeah dad, whatever. I’m with George right now, wanna say hi?”

George looks at Nikolai like a deer caught in headlights as Nikolai hands him the phone.

What? He mouths, and Nikolai shakes his head and mouths *trust me* back.

“Um, hello Nikolai’s dad,” he says into the receiver, already embarrassed as Nikolai laughs and motions for him to put it on speaker.

“George, heard so many good things about you!”

George laughs and tries not to sound as anxious as he feels, asks how he’s doing.

Nikolai’s dad is actually very nice in a way he doesn’t expect. He tells jokes, admits that he’s looked George up because he’s seen his name in the school paper due to his work on the school robotics team.

“I wish Nikolai would give it a shot, but all that kid thinks about is football. Gets it from his mother,” he says, and Nikolai rolls his eyes fondly.

“If you ever want to shadow any automation or mechatronic engineers, give me a call, alright?”

George thanks him for the opportunity, and feels pleasantly elated with the whole encounter.

“Your mother plays football?” he asks, and Nikolai shakes his head.

“No, she does football commentary on ESPN. She loves sports. My dad’s more of a nerd, like you.”

George fakes offence.

“I feel like,” Nikolai pauses for a second, collecting his thoughts. “Never mind.”

“No, what’s up?” George asks, shifting his chair closer to the bed where Nikolai is sitting.

“I dunno man, just,” he sighs. “I love my dad, just wish we could connect on shit like this more, y’know? In sophomore year I was really jealous of Dream actually, cause he was good at all this robot shit my dad likes, and the football shit my mom likes.”

He swallows hard, looks up at George to gauge a reaction.

“Sorry, did I say too much?” Nikolai asks, hand covering his elbow almost sheepishly.

“No, no, that’s- I’m glad you feel like you can talk to me. You can keep going, if you’d like,” George says, keeping his voice sincere.

“I was a real dick to you because I was jealous,” Nikolai admits. “I’ve been dealing with a lot recently, dude. And it’s nice to talk to the guys about it, but they don’t always like, get it. I just, I don’t know. I need to sort my shit out.”

George moves to the bed, putting his arm around Nikolai’s shoulder at some awkward attempt at a hug.

“I’m here for you, y’know. As a friend,” George says quietly.

Nikolai laughs shortly. “Thank god. Your hourly rates as a tutor were getting ridiculous.”

“You don’t have to pay me to hang out with you,” George says, feeling guilty as he removes his arms and settles for fidgeting with his fingers on his lap.

“George, I honestly don’t mean it like that, I promise. I just, I don’t know, I hope this doesn’t come off psycho, but I feel like, responsible for you in an older brother way. You’re dealing with a lot, I don’t want you to have to struggle unnecessarily. I know I didn’t- like, when I first met you, I took some shit out on you that wasn’t your fault in the slightest, and just-”

Nikolai breathes in shakily. “I don’t know. It doesn’t all even make sense to me and I haven’t processed it enough to talk about it.”

George runs a hand up and down his back sympathetically.

“Still though, you shouldn’t spend ridiculous amounts of money on me. I can get my job back, I’ll be okay,” George says, offering a smile.

“I’ve spent more ridiculous amounts of money on much more ridiculous things,” Nikolai says gravely, his words heavy as they hang in the air.

They sit there for a second, thinking.

“I still think you should go out with my friend. Just one date, and then I’ll fuck off forever about him. I’m just curious to know what you think!”

George sighs, throwing his head back in frustration.

“One date.”

Nikolai is elated by his surrender, laughing and bouncing up and down like a madman.

“What’s the time right now?” Nikolai asks, and George checks his phone.

“Three o’clock, on the dot.”

Nikolai’s eyes widened. “Oh shit, the team is coming over,” he says, getting off the bed and to his closet.

“I should probably head out too, I wanna grab something to eat before I meet Wilbur in the library,” George says, lying down and stretching out his back.

He collects his things and Nikolai grabs a backpack. “We’re going to scale the hill a few times,” he explains.

Pine Hill, ironically, was not located on a hill. It was actually built on the flatland right by the hills, a short walk from campus. A lot of people went hiking there on the weekends. George had only been a handful of times, but it was really lovely. The hills were the only thing between the school and the forest.

Two loud thuds, and an obnoxiously loud “FBI, open up!” could be heard from outside the door.

Nikolai unlocks the door and it flies open, Sapnap and Quackity barging in.

“You’re never free anymore, asshole, you’re always studying-” Sapnap starts, and then he turns and sees George.

“Hey George!” Quackity says, grinning at him. “How’re you?”

“Been okay, just getting work done,” he says, waving. “You?”

Quackity smiles even wider. “I’m fantastic. I’m about to make these motherfuckers run uphill for hours.”

“Sadist,” Sapnap says, shrugging his bag higher up on his shoulder.

“Didn’t know you and Nikolai were friends,” he says, turning to George. “How much is he paying you?”

“Enough,” George deadpans, and Sapnap cackles as Nikolai goes white.

“Nikolai has friends?” Dream’s voice calls from the hallway.

George feels awkward and out of place when Dream walks in, pulling up his hoodie sleeves. When his eyes meet George's, the room goes silent.

“Is this man bothering you, George?” Sapnap says, stepping forward, and Dream scoffs.

“Relax,” Dream says, drawing out the middle of the word.

He looks back and forth between George and Nikolai, and he looks at George with wide eyes like he’s trying to communicate something wordlessly.

“I’ll get out of your way,” George says, making his way towards the door. “Have fun on your hill run!”

“They won’t, I promise,” Quackity calls out to him. “Also, check your messages asshole!”

Of course he gets along with half the fucking team, Dream thinks to himself bitterly. Just like George to frame himself as some perfect individual and make Dream look crazy for not liking him.

“I didn’t know Nikolai and George were friends,” Dream tells Sapnap as they make their way back to the Ivory Towers. They left a little earlier than everyone else because Sapnap didn’t do his homework and Dream had to rewire that god awful board.

“Neither did I,” Sapnap says, huffing as they run downhill. “Why? Does it bother you? Got a little crush? On *George*? Or Nikolai? Or both of them? ”

“No, because-” Dream stops himself, unsure if this is a detail he should share.

Sapnap is his best friend though, and probably can provide some much valuable insight as to what things meant. He decides to provide a little bit of context, so he doesn’t sound insane.

“You can’t tell anyone this,” Dream emphasizes and Sapnap nods. “I found something suspicious on George’s side of the room. Like, there’s no reason for him to have what he had there. It’s not illegal, don’t look at me like that- it’s just weird. Like, unless he was involved in something weird, he shouldn’t have had what he had. Also, I wasn’t snooping, it just fell out at me,” he continues, and Sapnap looks at him confused.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

Dream presses his lips together for a second before he responds. “I mean this in the least judgemental and the most concerned friend way possible, but you know how Nikolai used to-

yeah,” Dream finishes, and Sapnap connects the dots.

“Oh shit- no way, *George*? Involved in that?”

“That’s what I thought, I just, I don’t know. That’s not the only possible solution, I know, but it’s just suspicious. I don’t care what he does, but if he ropes me into it as his roommate, I’m gonna be pissed.”

Sapnap thinks for a moment. “You could talk to him. Ask him if anything is up.”

Dream knows that George won’t tell him anything, but it’s worth a shot to try and get some information.

“Yeah, I’ll do that. How’s the progress on asking Karl out by the way?”

Sapnap looks at him murderously. “It would be completed if someone had the balls to ask George if he was single so I don’t risk making an ass out of myself. Can you do that before you tie him to a chair and make him tell you his business?”

Dream rolls his eyes as they walk through the gates. “You have my word. As long as you let me shower first.”

George is leaving the dorm when he’s getting back.

“Nuh uh,” says Dream. “Step inside for a moment. I need to talk to you.”

George looks up at him, unamused, but his brow twitches momentarily.

“First and foremost, is Karl single? I’m asking for a friend. Like, an actual friend.”

“Uh, yeah he is, but he likes somebody and he’s banking on them asking him out, so, I’d recommend you-”

“It’s not for me! It’s for a friend!”

George laughs shortly. “Alright. Is that it?”

“No, I wanna ask you about Nikolai. Didn’t know you guys were friends,” Dream says offhandedly.

“Didn’t think it was your business,” George responds coolly. “Why are you so obsessed with what I’m doing?”

“I’m not, just,” Dream pauses, his eyes flickering around for a second like they’re being watched. “Step inside. Come on.”

“No, I’m not doing anything,” George crosses his arms over his chest as he says it.

“I’ll explain inside, I promise. I’m not doing it to be weird.”

George looks at Dream for a moment and sees that he’s clearly not giving up anytime soon. He’s not leaving this alone, so he might as well clear up some of the air now.

“Okay.”

Once they're inside and Dream shuts the door, Dream begins his *debriefing*.

"Why are you hanging out with him?"

"Well, *dad-* "

"Well, *George*, " Dream starts, mocking his tone. "I'm not doing this to be funny, and I'm not doing this in an attempt to make you feel bad for hanging out with people. I'm telling you this out of a place of concern."

"I'm flattered," George says, clearly not flattered.

"George, Nikolai's- I love Nikolai, he's a great guy, great teammate. But he got involved with some weird stuff a few years back. I don't know if he's still involved, but just--"

"Wow, Dream. *Wow*, " George says, clearly more angry than he is grateful. "You're so full of shit, I can't believe you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you can't handle the fact that your friends like me, and they don't take your word as gospel. Grow up."

"It's not like that at all- what? I just said- are you even *listening* to what I'm saying?"

"I am listening," George continues. "I think you're being judgmental towards Nikolai in a way he doesn't deserve."

"I think you, are making premature judgements towards someone you barely fucking know!"

"Then tell me. What's this horrible thing he's done that's tainted his good reputation in *Dream's* eyes forever?"

"That isn't what I'm saying and you know it! Fuck you, I'm trying to help you out and make sure you don't get involved in some shit you don't even know the half of."

"No, I think you're a judgmental asshole who doesn't know anything, and you're trying to get in the way because you're upset you're not the only thing people focus on. I think you know nothing about Nikolai, and that you just hate everybody that struggles with anything ever, because you know that *we* didn't get everything handed to us the way you did!"

George is breathing hard, before he realizes what he's revealed. Fuck. He hopes Dream hasn't caught it, but he can't read his expression right now.

Struggle. There's a shared struggle between George and Nikolai.

"You know nothing about me either, George. And you don't know Nikolai the way I do. You can sit here and pretend you're better than me for judging, but you judge me all the fucking time."

"I know what you show me," George presses on, tilting his head challengingly. "And what you show me fucking sucks. You fucking suck."

Dream clenches his jaw, avoids taking the bait. "You can go now."

"So glad I've earned your permission," George spits, curtsying sarcastically as he leaves the room, slamming the door shut.

Chapter End Notes

bro we are over 20k words in and dream and george still cannot have a conversation without getting offended over nothing which mickey mouse writer did this (it was me) Anyways hi guys here's an update i wrote half of this while i was supposed to be doing an essay for english but FUCK english

Anyways how are you all

ALSO 312 KUDOS ARE YOU ALL INSANE HOW DID WE EVEN GET HEERE

Anyways hope you all enjoyed the chapter!! There may be a bigger gap between this one and the next one a heads up but i also don't know we'll see what happens

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Was this a good idea? Absolutely not. Was Dream still going to do it? Absolutely.

If he gets caught, is this going to end well for anybody, especially Dream? Hell no.

The bus to the robotics showcase was leaving in two hours, but Dream is marching up the stairs of the Ivory Towers, about to conduct an investigation nobody asked him to conduct.

He chose this last minute time in particular, because he knows George is too busy trying to get the junior team to cooperate to know what he's about to do and get pissed at him for it.

He knows that this shouldn't bother him as much as it does, the idea of George being potentially in danger. He doesn't think he would have been concerned for a moment if last year, if somebody told him that George was planning on dropping out of school to join the *mafia*. He thinks he would've laughed and thrown a party, maybe even would have bought George a coffin with warranty as a parting gift.

Look at him now: Distressed over the idea of George just possibly losing sleep.

It's all so different after having to live with George. Seeing a mildly compassionate side of him that was courteous and mature in contrast to the role of the cold opponent he'd slipped into in Dream's eyes. It makes him too real, too three dimensional to hate with fervour.

George lives like a goddamn prisoner of war. He doesn't keep extra things for fun, just a few photos and a calendar with cat pictures that looks like it was stolen from somebody's grandma. His stuff is neat and tidy, but George is surprisingly not that at all.

He's got all these nervous little habits that get under Dream's skin. How he seems to feed off Dream's frustration, his god awful sleep schedule. Dream thought his was bad, but Christ.

He disappears for hours at a time and gives no justification as to why. And sure, it isn't any of Dream's business, but it's the principal of the thing. Something is off.

When Dream hangs out with his friends, he doesn't come back to pass out onto the bed at strange hours the way George does.

For a while it had gotten better, but George hanging out with Nikolai, and sharing some sort of common struggle was a reason for concern in his books.

He knocks on Nikolai's door twice, and Nikolai emerges, looking like he just got out of bed.

"Hey, what're you doing here man?" he asks, yawning and stretching as he looks at Dream.

His eyes widened. "Don't tell me I slept through practice?"

"Nah, all good. No practice today. I'm only up because we got a robotics trip today," Dream explains. "George said he left a part here on your desk he wanted to bring, mind if I look for it?"

"Yeah, go for it," Nikolai says, stepping out of the way and letting him in. "I'm gonna hit the shower, just let yourself out when you're done."

Dream feels guilty for what he's about to do for a moment. Nikolai disappears into the bathroom, and Dream takes a look at his desk.

Nikolai and him used to be quite close, growing up. They played for the same soccer team as kids. His family moved further away when Dream started grade school, but they'd attend the same football camps. There's a picture of the two of them and Nikolai's brother, grinning from the sandbox still on Dream's fridge at home.

Things were so different now.

Nikolai's phone lights up, and it's a message from George.

George: Fine

George: Sounds good

George: Don't make me regret this please

The guilt melts away quickly. He was right, something is going on.

He tries to unlock Nikolai's phone, but it's password protected. He tries putting in his birthday, and thankfully it works. His eyes scan over the most recent messages. He hears the shower turn off.

Nikolai: 14 Laurelhurst Road

Nikolai: dress nice its a restaurant

George: Yay. I am so excited :I

Nikolai: i'm doing you a favor don't be rude

Nikolai: 1:00 pm next Sunday

George: That's hours before the halloween party

Nikolai: yes and

George: Fine

George: Sounds good

George: Don't make me regret this please

What does that even mean? Dream places Nikolai's phone down with shaky hands, and feels his own buzz in his back pocket. Fuck. It's George.

George: WHERE ARE YOU

George: The bus leaves so soon can you show some sort of punctualness

Dream sighs, shooting him a quick message that he's on his way. He puts 14 Laurelhurst Road at 1:00 pm next Sunday into his calendar. He's getting to the bottom of this, regardless of who he has to pry the truth out of.

When he gets to the bus, he slides down in the seat right next to George.

"We're leaving in fifteen minutes, why are you so late?" George asks, clearly unamused.

He sits there thinking as George flips through checklists and signs forms.

The teacher passes by their seat and looks pleasantly surprised at the two of them sitting together. She asks them about the board and why they don't work on it in the workroom anymore.

"We just like it in our room," Dream explains, laughing nervously.

"Yeah, it's easier to access. Plus we get inspired randomly so it's nice to get to work on it whenever we like," George chimes in.

She buys it, thankfully, and makes her way to the back of the bus.

"You don't have to sit here," George tries.

"I know."

"Dream, I'm nicely asking you to get lost."

"Come on George, it's our last fall showcase ever and we're seniors. Can't we try to pretend to be friends and have a good time?"

George huffs and turns to look at the window childishly.

"Are you mad at me Georgie?" Dream teases, poking a finger into George's cheek.

George's hand catches it in record time and bends it backwards.

"Okay, ow! I got it, I won't- ow, let go, let go!"

George rolls his eyes again, but a smile tugs at the corners of his lips.

"There we go! He smiles!"

“Why are you being so...” George starts, trailing off.

“I’m not, and this doesn’t change anything in the slightest. But come on, we can at least try to be nice to each other. We have eight more months living together before we never have to talk again. When you’re old and sending your kid off to high school for the first time, from your suburban house as your wife cooks breakfast or whatever in a sundress-”

George laughs, clearly amused, but he masks it with a cough.

“—you can tell them, oh, when I was in high school, I actually had an arch-nemesis. His name is Dream, you know, the richest and funniest guy in the world, and my now boss. We hated each other, but we got along a few times, and he’s so charitable to actually give me my job where I sit in a cubicle away from society so nobody has to hear my voice-”

“My god Dream, shut up,” George hisses, elbowing him in the ribs, but it seems to be without malicious intent.

“I will if you talk to me. We still have three hours on this bus, and I can talk for way longer than that, you’ll probably enjoy it more if it’s a two way conversation. I just get bored,” Dream pleads.

George relents, turning around to face Dream.

Jackpot.

If interrogation doesn’t work, he’ll just have to choke the information out of George with kindness. If he can’t figure out what’s going on right from George, he’ll just keep snooping. Worst comes to worst, he crashes George’s restaurant event, and if he ends up saving George’s life, then that’s just another thing he owes him.

It’s not his business, he knows, but it kind of is. Not that he’d ever say it out loud, but George is the only motherfucker in this school that knows how to challenge him. If he ends up in a situation that puts him at risk, that leaves Dream without anything to do or anyone to torment. He’s sure George would do the same, right?

“Don’t you have music that you can listen to?” George tries.

Dream grins and nods his head.

“Listen to it?”

Dream shakes his head no.

George rubs his temples exasperatedly.

The bus driver stands up and informs them all that it’s time to depart.

“Have you decided if you’re coming to the Halloween dance?” Dream blurts out before he can stop himself.

George doesn’t answer, he’s looking out the window.

“George?”

He taps his hand twice. George turns to look at him, sunlight filtering through his eyelashes, hitting his cheekbones.

“Are you coming to the Halloween dance?” he repeats.

George thinks for a second then nods slowly. “Yeah. Nikolai’s making me go.”

He looks at Dream for a reaction, like he knows it’s the answer that’ll piss him off. Dream decides to play the long game, and just nods.

“I just wanna apologize,” he says. “For prying into your life a few days ago. I know it isn’t my business, but I just...”

He trails off, hoping George catches what he’s insinuating, that something could potentially be very wrong, that Dream knows that something is very wrong.

“You’ve been apologizing more to me these past two months than you have our entire time here,” George points out.

“Well, I take accountability for my mistakes,” Dream states. “I don’t see you doing the same.”

“I’m not arguing with you here,” George decides, turning back to the window.

“Okay, okay, wait. I’ll be nice, I promise, I’m just bored, don’t ignore me,” Dream tries, a little too desperately. “Let’s play a game.”

George turns back to him. His neck must hurt from twisting around so much.

“You ever played the bad news game?” Dream tries.

“Your birth?” George quips.

Dream is not amused.

“Okay, okay, fine. How do you play?”

“One person gives a positive statement, starting with fortunately, and the other person has to put a negative twist on it, starting with unfortunately. And you do it with a straight face, then you continue going back and forth like that until one of you laughs. Like, for example, I would say fortunately, it’s a sunny day today! And then you would put a negative twist on it, like...”

“Unfortunately, you spent all your money on Wellies,” George adds.

“The fuck are Wellies?”

“Rain Boots.”

“Oh sorry, forgot you were Bri’ish,” Dream says, grinning, and it is George’s turn to look unentertained.

When they get off the bus, George is almost disappointed. He’d never admit it, but he had a good time. Most of the robotics bus trips consisted of him doing his homework or listening to music while staring out the window.

“You know, when you’re not being a piece of shit, you’re not half bad at carrying a conversation,” George finds himself admitting anyways.

“Awe, George,” Dream says, placing a hand over his heart as they walk towards the convention center.

“I still hate you,” George confirms.

“Feeling is mutual,” Dream verifies.

The robotics convention was one of George’s favourite outings, next to actual competition days. Full of technological trailblazers, engineering geniuses and people with inspirational stories. While he occasionally did have doubts about his dreams sometimes, it was these days that reminded him what he was working towards.

“Doctor Ritz is here today,” George tells Dream. “She’s developing a new material to make space suits out of.”

Dream usually just wanders around aimlessly during these showcases, but today he sits in with George at the auditorium and watches him clap for speaker after speaker with glittering eyes.

He really loves this shit. God, what a fucking nerd.

He feels like he has to prove something here too, that he’s got developed interests and hobbies in this. The first exhibit that catches Dream’s eye is the virtual reality seminar, and he splits off while George goes to some networking event.

“You can just network at Pine Hill,” He tries to convince George to come with him.

George insists that the experience was different, and leaves him alone. At the end, Dream is kind of glad, actually, because he finds himself talking to the people there after the presentation.

“Holy shit, some of these people are so hardworking,” Dream tells George as they get back onto the bus.

It’s only ten o’clock, but he’s exhausted.

“Well, yeah,” George says, looking at him like it was obvious.

“No like- there was this guy there, and he’s only a freshman, but he’s working part time and does research at the UCs. Bro, I can’t even name all the UCs, I’m so behind.”

They sit in silence for a few seconds. When Dream turns to George, he’s asleep, cheek pressed into the window.

When the bus stops in front of Pine Hill, George is still asleep. The teacher goes to wake him up, but Dream says he’ll just carry him to their dormitory.

“I’m glad you two are finally getting along,” she tells Dream.

“Bound to happen at some point, ma’am,” Dream tells her, smiling like he means it.

She tells him not to drop him, and that she’s excited for the next football game.

He carries George to their room. George still shows no signs of waking up, so Dream takes off George’s shoes, flings them towards the back of the room. George finally gains some sort of consciousness as he sets him down.

He mumbles something that sounds like he’s asking for the time, eyes half open.

“It’s almost two in the morning, go to bed, dork,” Dream says, and George complies without a snarky comment for maybe the first time in his life.

When George wakes up the next morning, Dream is gone, but there’s a note on his forehead.

good morning sleeping beauty

or should I say sleeping ugly (u can laugh it's a joke don't read into it)

Anyways don't freak out you fell asleep on the bus so I carried you back to the dorm because i'm a gentleman, never say I don't do anything nice for you

I'm venmoing you a request for one million dollars as compensation, thanks for understanding

- *Dream*

He scoffs, then laughs. When he’s not being irritating, talking to Dream is maybe not that bad. In a parallel universe, maybe they’re kind of acquaintances instead of rivals.

There’s three texts from Nikolai and four from Karl

Karl: we are going costume shopping

Karl: me you and not Wilbur

Karl: wilbur has bAnD pRaCtIcE

Karl: Also I have to tell you something!!!!

George texts a quick thumbs up in response.

Nikolai: yo

Nikolai: did Dream get your robotics thingy

Nikolai: that you wanted

George feels confused.

George: what thingy?

Nikolai responds almost immediately.

Nikolai: he came into my room y-day morning

Nikolai: he said u left something on my desk?

Dream walks into their room, almost as if it was timed.

“Hi George,” Dream says, smiling.

“Hi Dream,” George responds, his tone cold.

He looks up from his phone, the giddiness from yesterday all gone now. “Care to tell me why you told Nikolai I sent you to get something from his room?”

Chapter End Notes

!!!! more backstory who else cheered
i said slowburn im going to let this bitch SIMMER .
just a heads up tags will be updated as the story moves forward and things are
explicitly revealed - im not going to talk about these triggering topics in excruciating
detail, just sort of aftermath kinda stuff (and this does have a happy ending don't worry
i will make these motherfuckers kiss and make up if its the last thing i do)
the fact so many of you are subscribed to this is insane to me because that means over
150 of you get emails when i update. i cant even conceptualize 150 people. what the
fuck

Chapter 11

The wind whistles violently from outside the window. It buys Dream time to think.

“I used that as an excuse to get into his room,” Dream says calmly.

His heart is hammering in his chest, and he knows he’s caught unless he can lie himself out of this.

“Snooping? On your friends? That’s despicable,” George spits at him, crossing his arms over his chest.

“For your information George, it’s because his top school’s recruiter was asking about him. They’re gonna give him a deal, maybe take him before the next semester even starts,” Dream says.

“And the recruiter needed you in his room because...?”

“We wanted to get him a little gift as a team, I just went to take his jewelry size,” Dream states.

It’s George’s turn to be taken by surprise. His gaze flickers towards the floor and he pulls out his phone.

“I’m gonna tell him you got it,” he mumbles, and Dream breathes out a sigh of relief in his head.

He makes a note to himself to make a group chat with the team minus Nikolai and make sure he actually follows through on organizing that, in case George feels the need to start investigating. Also because what he said technically wasn’t a lie, just an afterthought to the actual operation.

“If you need any of his other sizes, just let me know. I’m there quite often,” George says, turning a shade of pink as he scratches his neck.

Dream nods, the room’s atmosphere turning suffocatingly awkward. He wonders if it would be inappropriate to ask any further questions.

“I’m sorry,” George says quietly.

“I’m sorry, what was that?” Dream asks, leaning in while cupping his ear.

If George was apologizing to him, he was going to milk the moment for everything it was worth.

“I said I’m sorry,” George repeats, looking Dream in the eyes.

Dream regrets asking again immediately. It’s uncomfortable and startling, too intimate.

“It’s okay,” Dream says.

He feels bad now, because technically George isn’t wrong. Dream is sticking his nose into other people’s business, but George doesn’t need to know that.

“What are you doing today?” He asks, desperately needing the environment to go back to lightheartedly spiteful.

“Don’t know, I may go shopping in the city with Karl,” George says.

“Fun,” Dream responds.

“What about you?”

“Gonna go run laps, might hang out with the guys, I don’t know,” he shrugs.

“Okay,” George yawns and stretches as he climbs out of bed. “See you.”

Dream watches George slip his feet into the bunny slippers by the corner of his bed.

“Sorry. Again,” George says, offering him an apologetic look.

“No, no worries, it was fair to ask,” Dream says, unable to deal with the guilt of accepting another apology.

He immediately heads to Sapnap’s room.

I mean, George would have never even thought about apologizing to Dream about anything in junior year. What the hell changed that made him so meek and compliant and tired this year?

It isn’t like he *cares* cares, but like, it’s just weird. Uncharacteristic of George to be too tired to fight.

He first noticed it when George brought him back dinner the day he nearly passed out from “heat exhaustion,” supposedly. When Dream tried to joke that it wasn’t enough.

He’s going in circles with this, but some gut feeling makes him want to investigate further.

The George he thought he knew (on a very rival, arch-nemesis relationship level) would have bit back, told him to maybe not be a fucking idiot and he could’ve picked out his own giant sized proportions.

Instead he’d apologized.

The lift is out of order for the first three floors at Ivory Towers today, so he’s got to walk up three flights of stairs. Joy.

Dream doesn’t think he’s even heard George apologize before this year, at least to him. Not when he accidentally spilt dark blue paint all over his sweater, or when he nearly killed him by switching his water with hydrochloric acid in chemistry.

(You should have known! It smells horrible, so if you think about it, I actually helped you out because I showed you that you should always be on your toes. Stop glowering at me! You didn’t even drink it, you almost drank it. I wouldn’t have had to teach you this lesson if you didn’t drop ketchup all over my History notes!)

Like, what the fuck is up with that? It’s no fun to fight somebody who doesn’t care to give a proper fight.

Maybe George is just growing out of this stupid little game they have earlier than Dream is, which is even worse because it makes Dream the childish one out of the two. He wants George to yell at him, wants to verbally spar back and forth all the fucking time because they don’t even have much time left to do that in the first place. They’ll forget each other by this time next year.

It doesn’t even matter. He’s overthinking things with George because he’s avoiding dealing with his own shit, which he’s got to get to soon.

He's going through the third floor corridor to get to the elevator when he hears it.

"Hey Dream," Nikolai's voice says from behind him.

He stops walking, turns and faces Nikolai, who's standing outside his room, looking very unhappy.

"Hi Nikolai," Dream says, forcing himself to smile pleasantly.

"Come in for a second," Nikolai says, kicking his door wider open.

"No, I'm okay, I gotta go," Dream says, but Nikolai grabs onto his shoulder.

"No, I think you're coming in," he says, laughing shortly.

Come on, he doesn't feel like doing this right now. Instead, he shrugs and walks in, feeling sick as Nikolai shuts the door.

"What's up, man?" he asks.

"What the fuck did you do to George?" Nikolai glowers at him.

"What the- huh? What? What do you mean?" Dream sputters out, and this seems to anger Nikolai further.

"You didn't come in my room yesterday to get a computer part *Clay*, come on. Tell the truth."

Dream grinds his teeth in frustration, staring down at Nikolai.

"I did, actually. You can ask him yourself."

Without warning, Nikolai grabs the scruff of his collar and pulls him forward. Dream is stronger than him and shoves him backwards.

"Okay, so don't try to attack me, first of all," Dream says sharply, holding a hand out in front of himself, and Nikolai sits down on the bed.

"You threatened him, didn't you? To lie for you? He was confused at first, and then a few minutes later, he magically remembered. You threatened him to lie for you," Nikolai accuses, face twisted in disgust.

"No, you asshole, George just has goldfish short term memory. What kind of person do you think I am Nikolai, what the hell?"

"I know you're nasty to him," Nikolai spits up at him, and Dream rolls his eyes.

"George isn't some little kid who can't take it. He's just as nasty to me. We're mean to each other sometimes, I'm not holding him at *gunpoint*, Jesus."

Nikolai is shaking, his facial expressions flickering between conflicted and upset.

"Hey," Dream says, softer now. "You good man?"

He steps forward slowly, and when Nikolai refuses to meet his eyes, he sits down on the bed next to him and wordlessly wraps an arm around his shoulder.

They sit there for a few minutes.

“He reminds me of him,” Nikolai finally says. “I’m sorry, for taking it out on you. I just- I don’t know if I’m going crazy or not, but he reminds me of Stefan. They have the same facial mannerisms. Do you see it too? Or am I just crazy?”

Dream’s stomach drops to his feet.

“What happened to him wasn’t your fault, y’know,” he says, rubbing Nikolai’s arm in what he hopes is a comforting manner. “You were fourteen years old. You couldn’t have known what he was doing all the way in LA.”

“I know, I just- I don’t know man, I know how people see me. They still see me like that, but I’m not that anymore. I’m not- I don’t. I was really horrible to everyone. I was horrible to you,” Nikolai admits. “I drank too much, did shit I shouldn’t have been doing, yelled at people for shit that wasn’t their fault. I’m still- I’m still working on it. I still get impulsive and weird sometimes. I get like that, but he always- he was my older brother, he kept me in check.”

He’s staring at the door blankly, and Dream swallows hard.

“I know you’ve only heard about it, you haven’t seen it,” Nikolai continues. “I know people talked during your freshman year about what I was like. It was really bad.”

“People here are always looking for shit to talk about man, they don’t know you,” Dream offers. “They don’t know what you went through then.”

He’s one of those people. Not directly, because he never said anything, but he sat there and listened. He sat there and believed everything people said about Nikolai without thinking twice.

“I’m sorry, Dream. I shouldn’t have freaked out at you, I just- I’m sorry. I’m being paranoid for no reason.”

Dream tries to not feel like the worst person alive as he accepts the second apology he doesn’t deserve today.

“Not everyone is as horrible as me,” Nikolai says, laughing bitterly.

Dream’s brain stops everything for a moment.

Okay, so maybe potentially only the eighth worst person alive, depending on Nikolai’s answer to his further prodding.

“What d’you mean?”

Nikolai shakes his head. “Don’t worry, nothing too bad, and it’s all settled now. I’ve repaid my debts.”

He thinks back to the cash stashed away in George’s old backpack, tucked away between the bed and the side table. He keeps rubbing circles on Nikolai’s back.

“You should be a cat,” Karl tells George, holding up a black bodysuit.

“No. No, no, no, never,” George says as Karl cracks up.

“Do I have to dress up? I’m gonna feel like an idiot,” George says, looking through the racks for a costume that doesn’t make him want to die. “What are you going as?”

Karl grins at him, beaming with happiness. “I’m matching with somebody, actually.”

“Oh?” George asks, raising his eyebrows.

Karl nods, still smiling widely. “I’m going as a packet of mustard.”

George has never heard those words announced so full of pride before in his life.

“Who’s going to be the ketchup?” he prods, though he’s already pretty sure what the answer is going to be.

“Guess!” Karl tells him anyways, bouncing on his heels.

“Was it Sapnap?”

“Right answer,” Karl tells him, tugging him forward to the next rack. “But we’re going as relish and mustard, not ketchup and mustard.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I can’t believe I assumed,” George says flatly.

Karl doesn’t pay mind to his sarcasm, and pulls out a clown mask. “Dude, I can’t believe they’re selling replicas of your face here!”

George sarcastically laughs as they continue searching through the mess of the store.

“Have you formally met Sapnap? He was like- I know you know Dream and you both have your differences, and that Sapnap is Dream’s friend, and-”

“I’ve talked to him maybe once.”

“What did he say?” Karl asks excitedly, like Sapnap cameos in other people’s lives were the most interesting thing on the planet.

“Dream was there, and he was like *oh, is this man bothering you George?*”

“He is such a gentleman,” Karl insists, and George laughs.

“He seems really nice though. I’m happy for you,” George says sincerely.

He is. Karl always keeps busy, stretches himself thin getting things done for other people. He’s probably the nicest person George knows, and if anyone deserves to be with somebody who treats him nicely, it’s Karl.

“He actually arranged to ask me for your hand,” George jokes, and Karl’s eyes widen.

“Yeah, Dream came up to me and asked if you were single, for a friend, and for a second my life flashed before my eyes,” George said. “But then he said it was actually for a friend.”

Karl rolls his eyes fondly. “Don’t worry George, I won’t be inserting myself into yours and Dream’s enemies to lovers arc.”

George gives a half-suppressed laugh. “Funny.”

He continues to shuffle through the bins, listening to Karl talk about his concept for a new science fiction film about radioactive sloths. He occasionally pitches in or asks a question.

“I think I’ll take this,” George says, pulling out a long black robe. “And just go as a Hogwarts student.”

“Oh come on, that’s a cop out costume,” Karl complains. “It’s so boring. Unless you make it sexy.”

George blinks at him. “I’m not going as a sexy Hogwarts student. Also, that’s like, fundamentally fucked up! They’re all only seventeen!”

“Oh sorry, not all of us have done our doctorate degrees in Harry Potter. And you totally could make it sexy, please George. I’ll buy you thigh highs,” Karl presses.

“I’m telling Sapnap,” George says flatly.

“He’s going to have to understand!” Karl says seriously.

They look at each other for a moment before they burst out laughing.

“I’m so glad you’re coming this year,” Karl continues. “To the dance. I know they’re usually not your thing.”

“Yeah well, I know-”

“Yeah, yeah, senior year, try everything, George’s coming of age moment, whatever,” Karl says, flailing his arms around.

“Well actually, what I was going to say was that I know how hard you worked on putting all of it together, so I’m attending just for you,” George says.

Karl smiles at him, beaming from ear to ear and it makes George feel warm.

“You mean it?”

“Obviously. Why else would I say it?”

Karl shoves George playfully. “Just for that I’ll accept the fact you’re wearing a boring costume.”

George tries to sneak a glance at the price tag when Karl isn’t looking, but he’s caught. He always feels guilty when that happens, because Karl always demands that he pays, and George feels like he’s being a bad person for letting it happen.

“Hand it over, George,” Karl says. “I got you.”

“No it’s all good, things are better now, seriously,” he says, because they are.

His mother recently got promoted, and he doesn’t have to work the same hours. It literally can’t get better than this.

“George, nobody here at Pine Hill earns their money, their parents don’t even earn their own money. I don’t think I have to lecture you on wealth dynamics though, you’re better at economics than I am. Don’t feel bad dude. I’m redistributing wealth, technically.”

“Still feels bad every single time,” George says as Karl pries the robes from his hands.

“Don’t feel bad,” Karl says, pulling him in for a hug in the middle of the store in front of everybody because why would he not?

When he pulls away he cracks another smile at George, before getting serious.

“When they eat the rich, please spare me,” Karl tells him.

George punches his shoulder.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Do you think it’s messed up that they had us debate eugenics in freshman year?” Dream finds himself thinking out loud.

They were sitting on the floor, surrounded by parts and blueprints. George was trying to loop thin metal wires together to create a chain, while Dream was attempting to figure out where exactly he should wire the motor onto the board. The things that need to get done are going to run well into school night, but they’d agreed to skip classes tomorrow and sleep to ensure that they stayed on track.

They’d fallen into a nice routine for the evenings this week. After Dream finished his English reading and George would get back from wherever the hell he was going, they’d sit in silence and work on different parts of the robotics project. It’s peaceful, and gives Dream an opportunity to quietly ask George questions without having it seem like he’s shaking him down.

“I mean, yeah. It’s not exactly a topic most fifteen year olds are equipped to talk about,” George says, not looking up.

His hands are shaking too hard to accurately bend the metal.

“Well that, and the fact that it’s wrong,” Dream continues. “I still can’t believe I won that while arguing *pro-eugenics*. What the fuck is wrong with people?”

George lets out a shaky breath, unable to concentrate. His head is heavy and he can feel his heart slamming around in his ribcage.

“Good job at the game yesterday,” George mutters.

“Thanks,” Dream responds. “You were there?”

“For the last little bit. Needed some fresh air,” George justifies.

The wire in George’s hands snaps in half.

“Nice one,” Dream tells him, not looking up from his task.

“Do you mind if I take a break?” George asks, setting everything down.

“Yeah, sure. I need one too actually,” Dream says. “Do you wanna order something to eat?”

“I’m okay,” George says, hugging his knees to his chest and tucking in his head.

Dream still texts Sapnap to bring them up an extra large pizza anyways. He stands up, stretching his legs and moves to lie down on his bed.

They sit in silence, surprisingly comfortable. The urgency of the robotics project has forced the two of them into a temporary truce.

“I’m going to shower,” George announces, walking over to his wardrobe and grabbing sweatpants and a hoodie.

When he disappears into the bathroom and the shower starts, Dream hears it again. Muffled hiccups from behind the door.

George is crying.

He doesn't know what the protocol for this situation is in the slightest. Sappap comes and drops off the pizza, and the shower is still running and George is presumably still crying.

He feels like if he doesn't intervene, it would make him kind of a bad person. So he tiptoes over to the bathroom door, knocks on it twice.

"George?"

The shower continues to run.

"Yeah?" George calls out, wincing as his voice cracks in the middle of the word.

Dream doesn't respond.

George is sitting on the bathroom floor, trying not to cry over the sound of the shower running. This is a new low. He can't take it. If they don't finish this board, they won't have a chance at placing in the competition. If they don't place at the competition, he loses his scholarship and he's fucked. He would have to go home, look Tilly and Leo and his mother and father in the eye and tell them he failed.

The worst part is they wouldn't even be mad at him for it. It's his own judgement that he's afraid of. He wanted to come here so badly that he was putting everyone in a stressful position.

He spent weeks and weeks on financial aid sites, looking for a way to make this financially viable. He was probably going to be paying off the loan for freshman year well into his twenties.

The worst part is, even if they take away his scholarship, George *can't* go back to England. He can't go home. He would take out loans and work twenty four hours a day if it meant he got to stay.

He hates that it's always cloudy in England, he hates that it feels so small. He hates all of it. Perhaps he came into this romanticizing America, but so far it had lived up to every great expectation. There was so much more, it was so much bigger, better.

Maybe it just felt that way because he was living in a castle, his only responsibilities travelling around, doing homework and making robots. England was probably fantastic too, outside of their two bedroom apartment.

He wouldn't fucking know.

"George, are you okay?" Dream calls out again.

George swallows. He can't let Dream see him like this. Despite the fact they tolerate each other as of this moment, he would rather die than give Dream the opportunity to make fun of him for this in the future.

"I'm fine," he says, voice breaking into a sob halfway through.

Fuck, now he sounds like he's having a mental breakdown, and Dream's going to tell everyone he's having a mental breakdown, and then he'll be so out of his head he won't be able to make this fucking robot, and then he won't be able to place, and he'll lose his scholarship, and he'll have to

go back there. He'd have to go away.

A pause. It makes George sick.

"Can I come in?" Dream tries, trying his best to convey the fact he feels bad for him.

"I'm showering," George responds.

"No you're not," Dream says matter of factly. "If you want to be alone right now, it's fine. I'll leave you alone. I'll even leave-"

"Don't leave!" George's voice comes out panicked.

He can't have Dream leave and tell everyone he's crying. He doesn't want everyone to know.

Dream hears the shower turn off, and the door handle slowly turns. George emerges, in the same clothes as earlier. His face is flushed pink, tears still collecting in the bottoms of his eyes. He avoids looking at Dream, walking right past him to their workspace. He gets on his knees as he clears some of the area up.

"Where were we?" George asks, wincing at how gone his voice sounds.

"I think we should continue taking a break," Dream says, gently taking the pliers out of George's hands.

"Stop," George pronounces the words through gritted teeth. "Stop doing that."

"Doing what?"

"If you wanna make fun of me, go ahead and do that now. Stop playing mind games and pretending to give a fuck," George says sharply, slamming his hands onto the floor as he attempts to stop himself from losing his balance.

The room is spinning.

"I'm not pretending, idiot," Dream says, feeling frustrated, but he reels himself in when he sees George is still shaking.

He doesn't say anything else, just clears the area around George and sits next to him. When George doesn't respond, still breathing heavily as tremors rock his body, Dream shifts closer holding out his arms.

George looks him in the eyes and Dream's heart twists painfully in his chest at how defeated he looks. He hates it.

Taking a jab at George or attempting to undermine him while he was weak would be a cowardly thing to do.

"I got you, c'mere," he says, pulling George closer to him, but keeping his grip loose enough to slip out of.

He half expects for George to snap and yell and hit him and run away. He doesn't, which is the most concerning part. He just lets Dream pull him into his chest and wrap his arms around him. George breathes in and goes to say something but it gets stuck in his throat.

"You're okay," Dream says, placing his chin on George's shoulder as he grips the back of George's sweatshirt tightly.

"I-I'm just," George starts, the words muffling as he starts sobbing.

Dream runs his hand up and down George's back in an attempt to soothe him. They stay there like that for a while, the room silent aside from George's occasional sniffing. When George calms down and stops shaking, Dream unwraps his arms from around him.

He has a million questions for him right now, but none of them feel right to ask. He settles for the most important one.

"Are you okay?"

George wipes his eyes and nods. "Sorry, don't know what came over me."

"Don't be sorry," Dream says. "It's okay. I get it. Things are hard right now. But if this is in regards to robotics, don't worry. Seriously. The initial stuff is the most time consuming for this design."

George swallows and nods again, before looking at Dream hesitantly.

"Can you please not tell anyone about this?"

Dream watches George's bottom lip quiver again. He's never seen him so vulnerable, he's a little in shock.

"Wouldn't *dream* of it," he says. "Pun intended."

George rolls his eyes.

"Don't you dare," George starts, laughing as he uses the heels of his palms to wipe away the tear tracks on his cheeks. "Don't you dare treat me differently for crying in front of you one time."

"Not even in your *dreams*," Dream says, grinning.

George ignores him this time and pops the box of pizza open. It's a little cold but it still looks good.

"Strap in," George tells Dream, crossing his legs and picking up a wire. "We're gonna be up all night for this one."

"Not the first time I've heard that line," Dream says.

George scoffs but cracks a smile.

"This is the dumbest fucking play idea I've ever seen," Sapnap argues. "This is why you get no bitches."

"You don't get bitches either Sapnap, shut the fuck up," Quackity yells, pointing his whiteboard marker at him furiously.

"You're right. I don't get bitches, I get respectable young suitors," Sapnap says back, and Dream

wonders how much better life would be if he could stick his head into a bucket of lava right now.

“Dream, what do you think?” Quackity says, redrawing one of the arrows. “This is such a good set up! They’ll never see it coming, look-”

“It is a bit ambitious,” Dream admits. “I don’t know if I can run that fast.”

“Just run faster, man,” Ross calls from the back.

“Yeah Dream, run faster,” Quackity echoes.

“Dream is so fast!” Sapnap defends him.

“You’re only defending him because you hate the play,” Quackity says, tossing the marker at Sapnap’s head.

Sapnap catches it and hurls it back.

The rest of the meeting is relatively fruitless. Quackity is red in the face by the very end, very irritated by the lack of cooperation.

They ultimately decide to sleep on the ideas and decide which ones work best during practice tomorrow, while being supervised by the coach so Quackity doesn’t lose his goddamn mind.

Dream walks back to his dorm, still trying to wrap his head around it. They have a game against a smaller school tomorrow, so they could give the play a shot, but after their underestimation of the first team they played and their strength, he’s beginning to doubt his abilities.

His phone rings, dad popping up on the display.

He’s been avoiding this. Talking to his parents.

He loves them, seriously, and he knows they love him too, and they only want the best for him, he knows.

He taps the accept button.

“Hey, I’m getting home from practice, I’ll call you back in twenty minutes.”

He hangs up before his father can respond.

He takes his time getting to their dorm. George isn’t home, he’s with Wilbur and Karl today. He’s slowly started opening up about where he’s going, which is great, if it wasn’t a lie half the time.

It’s almost insulting that George thinks he wouldn’t figure out that Karl and Sapnap hang out together after school every day they don’t have football practice or other meetings. It’s because George is actually with Nikolai, but Dream doesn’t understand why he lies about it. He always goes over to his place with that old backpack, but he still doesn’t know what they’re doing.

His educated guess? Drug dealing.

They’re sharing a struggle, so maybe they’ve turned to drugs to deal with it. And then they got caught up in some scheme, hence the copious amount of cash. Is that how it even worked? Dream doesn’t know.

Are they okay?

Originally his concern was Nikolai was roping George into this, but Nikolai also seemed to genuinely care for George's well being. Or did he only care that George didn't do anything like go to the authorities?

He doesn't know. He supposes this Sunday will provide some clarity. He's not even prepared for what that entails in the slightest. What if it's a major drug deal? That's kind of what it has to be.

His phone rings again. It's dad. He doesn't want to pick up, so he lets it go to voicemail.

Should Dream get a gun?

He knows kind of how to use one - his dad was into shooting and he'd been at a range a handful of times. That might incriminate him though, but it was better for him to be incriminated than all of them to be dead.

Okay, now he's very aware of the fact he's spiraling. No way George is dumb enough to get himself involved with something that intricate.

His phone rings a third time, and it's still his dad. He should probably pick up.

"Hi dad," he says. "I'm home."

"You've called maybe twice for the two months you've been away," his dad says in response. "Care to explain?"

"Been busy," Dream responds, mumbling.

"Are you struggling again? With school. None of your teachers have bothered to reach out, so I assume everything is okay."

"Yeah. I'm doing well, actually," Dream says.

"Good."

There's a moment of silence, before his dad continues.

"You were good at your last game, much better than the first one. I suppose the beginning of the season is always a little rough though. Your mother sends her regards. She wishes she could call, but you know how her hours are."

Dream nods, before realizing his father can't see it.

"How is everything else? Your robots?"

"Going well," Dream says.

"Is part of the reason you don't call because you have a *roommate*?" his dad asks, his tone indicating that he was about to start an argument.

Oh boy. Not this shit again.

"No. I enjoy having a roommate. He's on the robotics team too, actually, so we can work on everything whenever we like."

"That is good to hear."

It's always been a little awkward with Dream's father. He'd disappeared for a few months when Dream was a kid, but then came back. His mother buried herself in work to distract from it, and

Dream developed an affinity for being loud and demanding attention.

When he finally gets the okay to hang up, he breathes an audible sigh of relief.

It's all okay now, in the past. It happened so long ago there isn't much to process in regards to it. What's done is done.

Something stirs in George's bed. He nearly has a heart attack when it speaks.

"You enjoy having me as a roommate?"

George sits up, hair tousled from being under the covers.

"Holy shit, were you there this whole time?" Dream says, clutching his chest as George snickers, rolling over to face him.

"No, I manifested out of thin air ten seconds ago."

"Freak," Dream says, but only half-heartedly.

"For the record though, you're not the worst roommate I've had," George admits.

"Damn, who's the lucky individual who holds that title?" Dream says, shifting his chair closer to George's side of the room.

"Sophomore year," George starts, adjusting himself like this was his favourite story to tell. "His name was Evan, and let me tell you..."

Chapter End Notes

hi everyone so it turns out i am a bitch ass liar about the one week break my wrists are okay dont fret though! hope you all enjoyed this chapter and its developments/implications!

if anyone cares here's a little life update:

i keep saying i'm going to take a break because it's decisions week in Canada and we have to commit to universities soon and i thought i'd need longer to make my decision on my major but i've pretty much decided so it's all good :) writing also just helps me remove myself from the stress and hecticness of day to day life at the moment because there's just a lot going on (nothing bad just decisions to be made!) i'm super excited for this new stage in my life :))

I'm getting started on the harry potter au i mentioned a new chapters back, just working out some details to keep that shit canon compliant(ish). it's a bit of a niche au in general but i am so excited about it will keep you all posted as always, thank you all so much for the very nice and thoughtful comments :) i love hearing your thoughts and theories and ideas and seeing where/who caught on to certain implications it makes me know what i need to emphasize :) (i may have said this in previous authors notes but its just so true i appreciate you all for taking the time out of your days to comment a lot i will give you my firstborn child as a thank you) see you all soon for the next one :) thank you for reading!

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream has acquired everything for every possible scenario and outcome. He feels like an insane person, but he justifies that it would be better to feel insane than be dead.

He's borrowed Sapnap's car and packed some clothes away into the back, in case they need to get away for a few days. There's a first aid kit and three hundred dollars in cash and Advil tucked under the seat (incase they get hurt, incase they have to buy anything, incase George starts bitching at him again).

He even read a Reddit post on how to get away incase of an intense chase scene happening. He can't believe he's doing this; George owes him so bad if anything dangerous does manage to happen.

When George leaves their room, Dreams watches him catch the bus and waits twenty minutes before he gets in the car and starts driving.

George is beyond nervous. He hasn't gone on a first date with a guy since ever, but he didn't think to mention that detail to Nikolai, who is ecstatic.

The boy's name is Theo, and Nikolai gleefully shows him a few pictures. He's good looking; tall, dark curly hair, dimple when he smiles. Nikolai refuses to give him his phone number, stating that it was up to George to woo Theo into wanting to ask for his.

He gets to the restaurant and checks in.

After all the hype from Nikolai surrounding this date, the last thing George expects is being stood up.

He's been sitting at this restaurant alone for fifteen minutes, ignoring the knowing looks of pity from the waiters, when he gets a message from Nikolai.

Nikolai: dude my friend dipped

Nikolai: he got a country club invite

Nikolai: he's such an asshole i'm sorry man

Nikolai:...restaurant is good though

Nikolai: seriously i'd recommend still getting something

Nikolai: do u want me to come pick u up im sorry

Great. Now he'd look like a loser if he walked out and he'd look like a cheapskate if he didn't order

anything. He should've never came - he should've stayed home and worked on the stupid robot and taken a nap before the Halloween party. Instead, he's here in a dress shirt, sweating nervously like some middle schooler before eighth grade graduation.

He looks through the menu for a food item that doesn't sound absurd.

Is salad allowed to be thirty six dollars?

He's never heard of rockefeller oysters, or pescatone, and how is goat cheese a meal? *Who* eats goat cheese as a meal?

"George," a voice whispers above him, and he snaps his head up in alarm.

Dream. Fuck. What is he doing here?

"You scared me, you asshole," George hisses halfheartedly. "What are you doing here?"

"I love this restaurant," Dream says, knowing fully well he has never been to this place in his life. "What about you?"

He glances at the empty seat in front of George, and then at George's flushed face and baby blue dress shirt. No immediate signs of danger. When George doesn't answer him, he decides to press further.

"If I didn't know you, I'd think you were here on a date," Dream teases.

George's eyes widen and he declines this proposition in a way that is very obviously a lie and-

Oh. *Oh*.

Dream is a *fucking* idiot. Like big time.

This isn't a drug deal at all. This is a date. *George* has been set up to go on a *date*. He snuck past the hostess like a goddamned spy for no reason. Holy fucking shit! George is on a date! This is rich.

This still doesn't explain the amount of cash, but fuck *that* noise right now.

George! Who was he to deny himself the opportunity to embarrass George in front of someone he was romantically interested in?

"George, you *animal*," he says loudly, causing the table behind them to glance over as Dream sits down across from him.

"You didn't even tell me!"

"Why would I tell you? And what are you talking about?" George groans, covering his face with his hands in embarrassment.

"Where is she?" Dream asks, looking around wildly.

"They bailed," George finally admits. "And I feel like it's a dick move to walk out without ordering anything, so I'm trying to figure out what to do."

Dream laughs at him.

This is the best day of his life. He would never be given an opportunity like this ever again, to make a fool out of George in such a simple social setting. He's sick with joy. Whatever mess George and Nikolai are involved in that he has to do further detective work to figure out is forgiven by him.

"Don't be fucking rude," George says. "I haven't had any of the shit on this menu either, so I'm not sure what to do. Can you recommend something?"

It is Dream's turn to be caught off guard. He has never stepped foot in this restaurant before this day.

"Oh yeah, um, hand me the menu," he says, and George obliges.

When a waitress notices this, she comes and swiftly hands George another menu and tells them she'll return in a few minutes to take their order.

"We'll take the mushroom fritters and the cheese tortellini," Dream tells her when she does, and he crosses his fingers and hopes that both of those end up being good.

When she leaves, George's eyes widen.

"Wait, you didn't tell her the food is to go," he protests, and Dream holds up a hand.

"Now now, let's not be hasty, you came here for a date," Dream says, still smiling like a maniac. "I can fill in. A playful rival date - a hate, if you will."

"Yes, I was supposed to be here with a tall handsome golf player, not my idiot roommate! But *he* dipped, which doesn't mean you can just tag in!" George whispers furiously.

"Golf player? That's so boring," Dream remarks, before George's eyes go wide again and Dream's brain finishes processing what George said.

They sit in silence for a few seconds, and George's heart is slamming itself inside of his ribcage, *undo, undo, undo*.

"Damn," Dream finally says.

He sees the gears turning in George's head, trying to gage a reaction.

George knows Dream isn't homophobic - he can't be, right? His best friend is going out with a guy.

"Honestly, not surprised. This makes sense. I don't imagine girls are too enamoured by your fatal flaw of spending hours and hours rambling about processors. I don't think most dudes are either. But a golf guy? Yeah. Yeah, it makes sense."

George breathes out a sigh of relief.

"If you could keep that a secret," he requests quietly, "I'd appreciate it."

"Oh, of course dude, no worries at all. I wouldn't, cause like, y'know, me," he says, gesturing to himself.

"You..." George asks, confused, before-

No fucking way.

“You’re the straightest guy ever! No way!” George exclaims, and Dream laughs.

“Yes way,” Dream corrects him. “Haven’t you ever wondered why I don’t have a girlfriend?”

“You’re annoying, you don’t understand boundaries, you have such weird-” George starts, and Dream kicks him under the table.

“It’s actually because I don’t like girls. That much, I think. I don’t know. Don’t ask me about it,” Dream states, and George nods, saluting sarcastically.

His phone buzzes.

Nikolai: You need me to pick you up?

“Who’s that?” Dream asks, not expecting a real answer.

“Nikolai,” George says. “It was his friend, he set me up with him. He’s asking if I want a ride back to campus.”

Nikolai’s involvement was with setting up the date. Dream is an idiot.

“I’ll drive you back to campus,” Dream offers.

“How can I be sure you won’t kill me and toss my body out into the Oregon wilderness?” George asks, but he’s already texting Nikolai a no thank you.

“Damn, that was Plan A. You got me,” Dream says, sighing sarcastically.

The waitress returns and places the mushroom fritters in front of Dream, and the cheese tortellini in front of George.

“We’re on a date and we’re both gay. Can you believe it George?” Dream asks giddily, still high on the fact he does not have to fight anyone today. “This was not on my senior year bingo card.”

Dream pulls out his phone and holds it out to take a selfie of the both of them. They look ridiculous - George is pink in the face at Dream’s antics, and Dream’s hoodie and sweatpants make him severely mismatched to the general ambiance of the restaurant.

“This is the worst date ever,” George says, resting his chin on his palm as he glares at the camera.

“This is your only date ever,” Dream corrects. “I’m your first!”

“No,” George lies. “I’ve been on dates before.”

“Really?” Dream asks, and George goes pink even further as he shakes his head no in defeat.

“You’re so cute though,” Dream says, poking out his bottom lip into a pout mockingly as he leans closer to George. “But I guess a horrible personality doesn’t get cancelled out by just being pretty.” George is absolutely red now, but grins evilly before responding.

“Clearly it works enough - because you’re still here with me,” he whispers, blinking slowly up at him and Dream’s brain stops working for a second.

“Wh-What?” Dream sputters out, moving backwards. “I-Okay, well played. Good job. You win this round.”

George laughs, throwing his head back.

“I knew it. You’re all talk, can’t handle someone playing the same game as you even the slightest bit,” George says.

Dream takes a bite of the mushroom fritters to avoid responding. He tries to mask a gag. It’s disgusting, but he’s dug himself into this hole and has to power his way out.

He watches George take a bite out of the cheese tortellini, eyes lighting up in delight.

This is one hundred percent karma for being so excited over the idea of George getting stood up, he thinks bitterly.

He tries his best to enjoy the fritters.

(He doesn’t.)

“Why is there so much stuff in the back of your car?” George asks.

“This is Sapnap’s car. He’s a hoarder,” Dream lies, as they drive back to campus.

“Thanks for sitting with me,” George admits sheepishly. “I get so awkward in situations where I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“I can tell, idiot,” Dream says, the words coming out fonder than he means for them to.

“It’s kinda nice,” George continues. “Not being at each other’s throats all the time. You’re only a little worse than half as bad as I thought you were.”

Dream laughs. “God George, keep it in your pants.”

“You’re gross,” George says from beside him, crossing his arms. “Keep driving.”

When they get home, Dream sees George is planning to go to the party dressed as a Harry Potter character.

“You couldn’t pick a specific character even? You decided to go as generic Ravenclaw number seventeen?” Dream presses.

“Yes!” George protests.

He doesn’t understand all the outrage at his costume. He thinks it’s nice!

“What’re you going as?” George asks him, and Dream grins.

“A cat.”

“Don’t talk to me about being basic ever again,” George says, outraged.

“You- You have the ultimate cop out costume! It’s just cat ears!”

“I’ll draw on whiskers too, if it bothers you so badly,” Dream offers, and George rolls his eyes at

him as he storms into the bathroom.

When George emerges, Dream has to admit he looks good. He's wearing the fitted white shirt he usually wears during conferences, with a black robe that goes past his knees. There's a blue and bronze tie hanging off his shoulders.

He wants to say something nice, like *you look good*.

"You're the only person there that's going to be wearing dress pants, weirdo," he says instead.

George looks him over once too, even though there really isn't too much going on. A black fitted top, black pants, and two ridiculously fluffy cat ears attached to a headband on his head.

"Okay, catboy," George spits back, but he's laughing.

They arrive together, spotting Karl and Sapnap at the back near the concessions stand. They look ridiculous in their mustard and relish costumes - it looks like someone has stuck Karl inside a giant bottle of mustard, and a Sapnap inside a giant bottle of relish. Sapnap is spinning around and Karl is laughing at him.

"Hey," George greets, as Dream waves.

"George!" Sapnap says, smiling at him. "So glad you came!"

He pauses for a second, and thinks. "Not that I mean I didn't think you'd come, just Karl said you don't usually come to parties, so-"

"You don't have to be careful around me, I won't bite," George laughs.

Karl laughs. "See? You don't have to kiss up to George. You just have to kiss me," he says, dramatically falling.

Sapnap goes to catch him but fails, the boxiness of the costume preventing him from taking Karl into his arms.

"Am I seeing right?" Quackity's voice calls from behind them as he hooks an arm around George's shoulder and then Dream's.

"Dream? George? Are you both being held hostage? Blink twice if someone is holding you both at gunpoint to not argue," he says, and George laughs.

"What are you supposed to be?" Dream asks Quackity, who is dressed in normal clothes.

"I'm Jughead!" Quackity says, motioning towards his beanie.

Sapnap and Karl boo loudly.

"Is Nikolai here?" George asks him.

"Yeah, he was looking for you earlier, he's on the dance floor," Quackity says, pointing him in the right direction.

George nods. "Be right back."

He looks at Quackity, then Karl, then Dream, then Sapnap, and then back at Dream.

He smiles, before scampering off to find Nikolai.

“Dude, I’m so sorry,” Nikolai starts, but George shakes his head.

“Don’t worry about it,” George says. “It’s all good.”

Nikolai still apologizes again, and then a girl appears next to him.

“Oh, don’t- I’ll just-” George starts, as Nikolai wraps an arm around her waist. He mouths *thank you* to George over her head as George slowly removes himself from the situation.

Dream is laughing when he returns to the corner, while Quackity watches him with an amused glint in his eye.

“Where’d Karl and Sapnap go?” George asks.

“To look at the stars,” Dream says, as Quackity gags. “Sapnap’s gonna ask Karl the question.”

“Marriage?” George practically yells, eyes popping out his sockets.

“No, idiot, to be like, officially boyfriends,” Dream says.

“That’s gross. I can’t believe they like that shit- going on dates, flirting-” Quackity starts.

“George and I went on a date today,” Dream says, grinning.

“We did not,” George denies, feeling himself go red.

“I don’t believe either of you,” Quackity says matter of factly.

“Dream, go fetch me some punch,” George says suddenly.

“I’m a cat, not a dog,” Dream grumbles, but he walks down to where the drinks are anyways.

“Huh,” Quackity says, standing closer to George. “Didn’t see that one coming.”

George turns to him. “What?”

Quackity shakes his head. “Nothing.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone!

Can you believe they are getting along? Me neither.

Also everyone being very concerned about Dream considering getting a gun was hilarious pls I do not trust this character with JACKSHIT

Also, the Harry Potter AU is up! It’s called Catalyst :) One Sided Enemies to friends to lovers because that is all I write. If you have any feedback at all it is very greatly appreciated! I’m so nervous because the chapters there are only 2000 words instead of ~2500 (how long the chapters are for this fic) and the writing style I’m trying is also different (this is once again me overthinking).

Thank you all once again for all the nice comments and congratulations on the last chapter :) See you all in the next one :)

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They're working the afternoon after the party, despite Nikolai's hangover and the exhaustion in George's bones. It's the good kind of exhaustion, so he doesn't mind.

"So you did end up having fun at the party," Nikolai says, slapping George's shoulder. "See? What did I tell you? The experiences you've never had are experiences you can never judge."

"You've literally never said that to me," George responds, pressing the arrow keys on Nikolai's laptop to erase an extra comma in his essay.

Still, he can't help but smile. For once, everything was going good. He probably wouldn't have to work again this year, the robotics project was almost done and a week ahead of time too, and he was enjoying himself outside of school.

"I will start saying that, then," Nikolai proclaims, getting up from the desk to once again flop himself onto the bed.

"Dude, you cannot study on the bed," George groaned. "How many times do we have to have this conversation?"

"Yeah yeah, messed up neurons or whatever, who cares. I'm gonna play football in college, shit's gonna get knocked around in here anyways," Nikolai says, tapping his knuckles on his temples. "Also, remind me to pay you for coming to the party."

"Don't pay me," George says. "Seriously. And I technically don't need it."

George continues going through Nikolai's paper but it has very few errors if any. He's very impressed, they've made a lot of progress.

"I haven't forgotten your birthday present George, don't worry, it's just gotten delayed in the post," Nikolai tells him.

"You didn't have to," George responds. "Seriously. You already pay me way too much for what I do."

There's a beat of silence.

"Can I tell you something George?" Nikolai says from the bed.

"Go for it," George replies, adding a space between an incorrect preposition.

"You remind me of my older brother," Nikolai confesses. "Which is weird- but like, I don't know. He was really like you. Loved mechanics and shit. He was always a high achiever."

Was?

Nikolai props himself up on his elbows to look at George properly.

"Yeah, he passed after my freshman year. It's why I had to take a year off, I was losing my shit."

“Oh no, I’m so- I’m so sorry Nikolai,” George says sincerely, placing the laptop aside.

“No, don’t be, it isn’t- not your fault, y’know? But I just got really bipolar after he died. Was nasty to people for no reason and then would pretend nothing happened. Got into drugs and shit for a bit too, which is a fucked up thing to be into at fifteen,” Nikolai continues.

George feels he isn’t supposed to respond here, so he just nods as encouragement for Nikolai to continue.

“I feel really bad for what I did to you at the beginning of the year,” Nikolai admits. “It was really fucked up. And then you started almost crying, and I just felt like a piece of shit. So I kinda made you my tutor to make myself feel better about it, y’know? Cause that was a just way to deal with it, in my eyes then.”

Nikolai swallows, eyes welling up with tears. “But like, I’ve done the best in school ever since we started, and then you ended up being so nice about the whole thing, and I just like, I never gave a fuck about school until this and now I’m actually doing okay.”

George walks over to the bed and sits next to him, gripping his shoulders tightly for a second before pulling him in for a hug.

“This shit is so- ugh man, I just can’t believe this. I got- I got scouted by the University of South California, George. They wanna sign me starting next semester, and it’s all thanks to you. My GPA wouldn’t be where it is without your help,” Nikolai says, grinning as he stands up.

“Nikolai, holy shit! That’s amazing,” George says, beaming at him.

“Yeah, I have enough credits to graduate, and I spoke to my parents and they said there’s no point in just wasting time in high school if they’re willing to let me start early,” Nikolai says, suddenly becoming sad again. “I’ll miss you, though.”

“Oh come on, we still have a few months left, let’s not do this,” George protests as Nikolai laughs.

“Deal. Just, thank you. I really- I thought I’d end up somewhere else maybe at a mid-tier and that’s not necessarily bad, but I went through all the trouble of attending Pine Hill, and I just wanted to do better, y’know?”

George thinks of himself back in eighth grade, on the line with financial aid offices for hours at a time. He thinks of Nikolai in their morning tutoring sessions, bags under his eyes from not being able to sleep, grinning ear to ear because he finally understands thermodynamics. He thinks of Wilbur waking up early to drive down to the city to play guitar with the buskers, Karl staying up late talking to homesick freshmen, even Dream asleep on the floor of their room, screwdriver still in his fist (idiot. If George wasn’t there to take it out of his hands in the late hours, he probably would have accidentally poked his own eye out with it by now).

They all want what’s best for themselves, working with what they have.

“Well you did better. You’re doing great,” George states.

"You messed up, Clay," his father's voice states through the receiver.

Dream doesn't even know how it happened. He had written his english paper on the wrong topic altogether, resulting in being marked as a fail.

"Dad, I talked to the teacher, she said I could redo it and that she'd sub in my grade--"

"This shouldn't have happened in the first place," his father responds coldly.

They've been having this argument for longer than necessary. It wasn't even a big deal; his teacher said that she understood, and to turn in the right paper by the end of the week with no penalty. Regardless, she was required to email his parents and they'd been chewing him out for the last however many minutes.

"My roommate will be back soon, can we please discuss this later?" Dream attempts to make his voice sound levelled.

"We've taken time out of our days to talk with you, the least you could do is be grateful."

Yeah, he's really grateful that he got shipped off to boarding school as early as possible, he thinks bitterly, but yet, here they are. He loves his parents, he really does, but sometimes their attitude towards any of Dream's perceived shortcomings were discouraging to say the least.

"It's my roommate's birthday," he continues. "I gotta go...order him cake."

"Well, in that case, don't let us hold you up," his mother says flatly.

"I won't!" Dream says, hanging up his phone and then turning it off for good measure.

He actually did not, for the record, forget George's birthday. Well, he wasn't aware until last night at the party, when Karl pulled him aside and informed him that they were going to do a little thing for him the next day, but still. He knew now! And he'll use any excuse to stop talking to his parents when they were pissed at him, to be honest.

Him and George had a better relationship now than they did at the beginning of the year, and not that Dream would ever tell him this, but he's fond of George.

They're kind of friends now, right? Enough for Karl to invite him to participate in this thing. Which makes it okay for Dream to ask him questions and figure out if he's actually in trouble.

Which, now that he thinks about it, has sort of taken over all of his thoughts.

He makes his way down to the gates of the school and looks for the green car that's supposed to be dropping off the cake.

He makes his way towards the Ivory Towers, and onto the third floor recreation lounge. There's a reserved sign hung on the door. He uses his shoulder to open it, and enters to see blue and white balloons scattered over the floor, and a red faced Sapnap sitting in the middle.

"Dream, go put the cake on that table and then hide!" Karl orders as he and Wilbur struggle with the speakers. "Nikolai says he's dropping off George in fifteen minutes."

So Dream does, popping open the cake box and carefully placing it on the table. When he goes to look at it, he bites back a gasp.

The cake is blue and has little golden flowers decorating the border. That isn't the problem though.

The middle of the cake, in cursive lettering, the words “Happy Birthday Gorge” sit confidently. Gorge.

“There something wrong with the cake?” Sarnap asks.

“No, everything is- It’s perfect. Never seen a more perfect cake in my life,” Dream continues, which makes Sarnap rush over.

When he sees it, his eyes widen for a moment and he chokes out a laugh, before getting serious again.

“Do not tell Karl, please,” Sarnap whispers. “I was the one who ordered the cake and I’m definitely the one who messed up the spelling.”

Quackity walks in, holding a reusable grocery bag with a Monopoly sticking out of it.

“Where do I put this?” He asks Dream, who motions to the other card table they’ve set up.

“He’s walking in,” Wilbur shouts. “Everyone hide!”

They all crowd behind the food table, Sarnap hissing at them to be more careful when Quackity accidentally kicks the leg of it.

“Fuck, we forgot to turn on the lights,” Dream whispers. “What do we do?”

There are two sharp knocks on the door of the room.

“Um, hello? Mr. Bridgers? Nikolai said you needed to meet me here,” George’s voice calls.

They panic for a second.

“What do we do?” Wilbur asks frantically.

There is silence for a few seconds before George knocks again.

“Um,” Sarnap starts, trying his best to drop his voice a few octaves.

Karl puts his head in his hands.

“Come in George, plenty to discuss,” Sarnap continues, and Dream does his best to stifle a laugh.

George opens the door slowly, and they pop up from behind the table, Wilbur, counting them in.

One, two, three...

“Surprise!”

Dream watches as George’s eyebrows furrow in confusion for a moment as he tugs on the sleeve of his sweater. Then he smiles, beaming at them.

Dream feels his stomach do a summersault.

It’s like, a fact that George is good-looking, but he hasn’t noticed until now that the grooves that formed when his eyes crinkled lined up perfectly with his laugh lines.

Huh. That’s a weird thing to think.

Everyone's lining up to give George a hug, so Dream stands at the very back, a little unsure of his place in all of this.

When George reaches him, his smile contorts into a sneer.

"Who invited you?"

The room goes uncomfortably silent and Dream shifts on the spot.

"I can- I'll go if-" Dream starts, before George laughs, standing on his toes to wrap his arms around Dream's shoulders.

"I'm only kidding," George whispers in his ears. "Take a joke, Dream."

Dream cannot take a joke. He feels frozen in place.

They talk, play Cards Against Humanity and Jenga. Quackity throws a wooden block at Sapnap, who narrowly dodges it.

George thinks the Gorge on the cake is hilarious, until Wilbur tells him that Gorge means throat in french. Before they know it it's past curfew, and Dream and George have to walk back to the Lighthouse.

The air is cold as it always is at the beginning of November, but George doesn't think there's a single moment where he's been happier.

"That was fun, thanks for coming," George tells him as they climb into their respective beds.

"No worries, uh, I had fun too," Dream says, lying on his back so he doesn't have to look George in the eyes.

Not that there's anything wrong with his eyes. George is just making him nervous today.



They both wake up fifteen minutes before class because miraculously, neither of them had the sense to set an alarm. They throw on their uniforms in record time and George tosses their books into his bag as Dream frantically searches for their room key.

They manage to make it only two minutes late, out of breath. George's blazer is slung over his shoulder, Dream's tie is untied and his shirt is untucked. They apologize profusely to Mr. Kennedy, who looks back and forth at the two of them in shock for a moment.

"We both slept in, forgot to set alarms," Dream says. "In my defence, George usually sets the alarm. That's his responsibility."

"I set my alarms for me, not the both of us! Don't get codependent," George argues.

Mr. Kennedy looks amused now, and waves them to their seats.

George glances at his phone as it lights up. It's a message from Wilbur, who's gaping at him from across the class.

Wilbur: Did you fuck???

Wilbur: George wtfff

Wilbur: Plot twist of the century

Wilbur: Good for you tho wow

George glares at him and sticks up his middle finger at him quickly, before sitting down in his seat. Dream leans over his desk to whisper in George's ear.

"What did he say?"

George shakes his head.

Mr. Kennedy gives them time to practice for their debates, so George turns his chair around to face Dream.

"What did Wilbur say?" Dream asks again, kicking the leg of George's chair childishly.

"He said it looked like we...like we shagged before we came in here," George says, rolling his eyes, but his cheeks feel pink.

"Shagged? God George, that's so Bri'ish I wanna throw up," Dream says, and George smacks his arm.

They scribble down some thoughts on paper for a bit, making small talk as they go.

"Nikolai's leaving next semester," George announces gloomily, and Dream nods.

"Yeah, it sucks to see him leave early. So so happy for him though," Dream says sincerely.

"For sure, I'm just gonna miss him. Never tell him this, but I've actually really enjoyed our tutoring sessions together."

Dream frowns. "Tutoring?"

George's eyes widened, like he said something he wasn't supposed to.

"Uh, yeah, been tutoring Nikolai in a handful of subjects just here and there," George says.

"So that's- wait," Dream says, the puzzle pieces coming together in his head.

George is tutoring Nikolai. When he disappears to hang out with Nikolai, he's tutoring him. Dream tries his best to make a hypothetical; He's doing it "here and there," which means that there isn't a schedule for it. Which potentially means he's paying him on the spot, in cash, which means that...

George is not in danger. Nikolai is not in danger either. They're just doing fucking homework.

Out of every anticlimactic event in his life, this has got to be the worst.

"So that's why you've been carrying around that much cash!" Dream announces in relief, before he can think through what he's saying.

George's eyes widen again, but then they go cold, void of emotion.

"How do you know about that, Dream?" George asks him, voice angry and dangerous.

Chapter End Notes

To everyone begging me to give them one more moment of peace before I took it from them I'm sorry please forgive me (I'm not sorry).

Also holy shit how are we at 578 kudos? Thank you guys so so much :) I didn't expect this many AT ALL I'm so thankful so many of you like this story (and another thank you to everyone who takes the time out of their day to leave a comment too :))

This is more comments than I'm used to, to be honest, and I read every single one and reply to every single one but if I miss yours just an apology in advance I swear I've read it I might've just forgotten to reply/missed it/written a reply but it didn't go through. Just wanted to clarify and say I'm not purposefully ignoring anyone or anything.

Hope all of you are doing good! We're nearing June which is always fun because summer (for the northern hemisphere lol)! Even though with covid restrictions and necessary safety measures it isn't always possible to do fun stuff, hopefully everyone gets the opportunity to (safely) see people if you haven't been able to AND/OR get vaccinated :)

As always, would love to hear your thoughts, thank you all for reading and I will see you all in the next one!!

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fuck.

Fuck Fuck Fuck Fuck *Fuck*.

Dream tries to think of an excuse, tries to say something or do something other than gape at George like a fish, but he can't. The anger in George's eyes dissipates and turns into hurt, which is so much worse.

George can't believe it. He can't believe he had trusted Dream with the potential idea of friendship. It's his own fault for underestimating how cruel he knows Dream has the potential to be, for getting his head so far up in the clouds that he thought the two of them getting along wasn't absurd.

"George," Dream says quietly, and it makes George feel sick. "Can we please talk about this back in our room instead of here?"

George laughs bitterly.

What's the point? He knows once Dream finds out, he'll run away and tell everyone under the sun about George's financial situation. George knows how some of the kids will treat him once that information is public. They'll dangle dollars in front of his face, jeer and laugh at him like he's some sort of pet. George has been so careful for three years, and he had to blow it now.

He'd thought there was a possibility, a shred of a chance that despite the fact they don't like each other, Dream was still a respectable opponent because he wasn't cruel the way some other people were.

Dream will scatter rumours with the truth, he'll talk so much shit, and he'll do it right to George's face, which is worse. George will have nothing to say.

Dream has outsmarted him. He's pretended to be George's friend, he's pretended like he genuinely enjoys his company, and has swept the rug from underneath George's feet the second he could.

Dream wins, because if George gets upset here, he will already look hysterical. Dream wins because if he gets upset in his room, their room, Dream will be there to watch. Dream wins when George loses - the consequence of being involved in all the same things.

It's George's fault. It's George's fault for not being more cautious while he slept six feet away from the enemy.

So George doesn't react the way he feels. He swallows down the lump in his throat and looks Dream in the eyes.

"No. There's nothing to talk about," he says. "Go ahead, make the assumptions I know you're going to make. Go tell the whole fucking school, Dream. Hope it makes you happy," George starts, standing up from his seat.

He's panicking, but Dream absolutely cannot know. His stomach lurches forward in disgust - last time he had a moment of anxiety, Dream had held him, grounded him, pretended to care so he

could take a closer look at George without arousing suspicion-

To gain an upper hand on him.

This is some silly little mind game for Dream. He doesn't even know, doesn't even care what I'll have to deal with.

"Fuck you, Dream," George spits at him, and he wants to clock him in the face for having the audacity to appear confused right now.

"George, please-" Dream starts, reaching out for him, and George retracts his hands from the desk.

"*Don't*, don't touch me," George says.

So much for his plan to not make it a big deal.

He doesn't know what he expected from somebody like Dream. Somebody that could never understand George's situation, the way it eats at him every day.

"I feel kind of sick sir, I'm going to go lay down," George says flatly at Mr. Kennedy, not even waiting for a response as he walks out of the classroom.

He's sick of this. He hates this place right now.

He knows so many good people exist here, Wilbur and Karl are blowing up his messages at the moment. But he doesn't want to become someone different for everyone to laugh and point at, because if there's anything people at Pine Hill are good at, it's being nosy. He locks the door and lies down on the bed, finally daring to glance at his screen.

Wilbur: George

Wilbur: George are you okay?

Wilbur: call me if you need somebody i got you :(

Karl: Wilbur says you walked out of class not feeling good

Karl: just checking in, text me back

Karl: if you need a nurse I have a sexy costume and a spare rn

Karl: ok say no more I'm coming

Dream: hey, i'm sorry

Dream: please, let me explain myself - you have every right to hate me, but please George

How dare he still pretend to care, George thinks to himself angrily. He finds himself typing a response before he can stop.

George: You already have enough information to make my life difficult

George: Hope it feels good Clay, you can drop the act!

He sees the texting bubbles start and pause and start up again.

Dream: George, idk what you're talking about

Dream: please, let me explain

George turns off his phone and doesn't bother responding. He lies there and thinks about what it would be like to just disappear for a moment, to not have to deal with all these politics.

Politics.

The debate is next week.

George almost forgot, too. Dream planned this so he could beat George in some silly debate that counts for jackshit. Another painful reminder of how little Dream actually cares for him, when George had begun seeing him as a friend.

There's a knock at his door.

"George, it's Karl."

He stares at the ceiling for one more moment, before standing up and going to open the door.

It's actually Karl and Sapnap and Quackity.

"Heard you were not feeling well," Karl says, ushering George into bed. "We've got soup--"

Sapnap holds up a thermos containing, presumably, soup.

"I'm not sick sick," George says.

He doesn't quite feel like entertaining Dream's friends, something scared inside him wondering if they've only pretended to like him too.

Quackity puts a cold hand on his forehead and it feels so much like his mother's he almost bursts into tears.

"What's up then?" Sapnap asks him.

"I just," George starts, but he isn't sure how to finish. "I feel sad."

It's the closest thing to the truth he can give.

"You know how to drive, George?" Sapnap asks him, and George shakes his head no.

Sapnap fishes car keys out of his pocket and jingles them before grinning.

“I can. Let’s go for a drive.”

Quackity stands up and gives George space to crawl out of bed.

“You don’t have to,” he starts, but Karl shushes him.

“George, you work so hard dude, wouldn’t have passed math without you sophomore year, so take this as a thank you,” Sapnap says.

George looks at him, confused.

“You tutored me!” Sapnap exclaims. “For quadratics, like twice. Do you not remember?”

“I tutor a lot of people,” George says sheepishly. “Sorry.”

Sapnap sighs. “No worries. I get that I’m just another one of your students, nothing special…”

George has to crack a smile at that one.

Karl wraps an arm around his shoulder and Quackity grabs his sleeve and they pull him forward and down the hall and into the parking lot.

George climbs into the back with Quackity as Karl takes the passenger. He remembers the last time he sat there with Dream in the driver's seat.

“I don’t plan on attending any classes today,” Quackity states.

Everyone else mutters out something in agreement.

“Where should we go?” Sapnap asks, pulling them out of the parking lot. “Wait, let me ask Dream if he wants to come with?”

George feels his jaw clench for a moment. Quackity glances at him for a moment before speaking.

“Nah, he’s got to get his shit together for english, leave him alone,” he says.

George feels guilty for doubting Quackity at all.

“I’ve got somewhere we can go, it’s a little less than two hours from here,” Karl says, typing something into his phone.

George can’t help but feel excited. He’s never done anything like this before - always opting to stay in class whenever Wilbur or Karl invited him to be spontaneous.

“Hope you all like country music,” Sapnap says, turning on the radio.

Quackity screams and covers his ears, leaning back onto George in mock horror.

George laughs again and tries to ignore the sinking pit in his stomach.

Dream knows he's fucked up.

It's all he thinks about in all his classes - he's so out of it. He feels so guilty. He knows what George does is none of his business, but he didn't know it was such a touchy subject.

Well, he kind of did. He had gone ahead and made all sorts of crazy assumptions.

Those assumptions could technically still be right. George hasn't exactly given him a definitive yes or no as to what's happening.

When he gets back to their dorm, George is gone.

He panics and debates texting him, but seeing as his last message went ignored, it probably wouldn't lead to anything.

He didn't mean for anything like this to happen, didn't mean for George to be hurt - he just wanted to make sure George was okay. By the looks of it, he's made things worse.

He doesn't feel like talking to anyone, so he lies in bed and waits for George to come back, and hopes that if he grovels enough, he'll be given an opportunity to explain himself.

He contemplates calling his parents for advice, but doesn't have much faith that what they'd say would make him feel better. They're probably still mad at him for dipping out of their phone call.

Some part of him wishes they'd tried to call him again when he hung up. He shakes the thought away - one misery at a time, and George took priority at the moment.

They stop at McDonald's to grab food, but Karl insists they wait just five more minutes before they start eating since they're almost there.

They arrive at a field and they trek out to see whatever it is Karl is so adamant they do-

It's a mountain.

Karl has brought them to a mountain.

"Surprise!" He proclaims proudly.

"Sapnap, run all the way up and give me twenty pushups," Quackity says without missing a beat, and Sapnap's eyes widen in horror.

"Please, not that again," he begs, and Quackity laughs.

"We're not actually climbing it are we?" George asks, not in the mood for exercise (especially in his uniform).

"No, no, it's an inactive volcano and it's been having some activity so getting close to it is a no, but this is about the best view we can get right now!"

"You brought us to a fucking volcano?" Quackity asks him. "To what? *Die?*"

“It’s so pretty! I’ve always wanted to see,” Karl defends.

George and Sapnap see a tourist board a few feet away and walk towards it.

“Mount Shasta,” George reads.

“Legend has it it is home to a sacred spring,” Karl says excitedly. “We aren’t here for the spring though.”

“Why are we here then?” Sapnap asks, wrapping an arm around his waist and casually pulling him closer.

“Because we graduate this year,” Karl says quietly. “We’re all gonna leave. Find bigger hills than Pine Hill to climb. Go our separate ways.”

George feels so mixed about the whole prospect. He is excited for sure, but he’s going to miss Wilbur and Karl. He’s gonna miss Sapnap and Quackity too. And Nikolai. Not Dream. He can rot.

But George didn’t expect to become so close with so many people this year. It hadn’t happened before. He supposes he has more time nowadays to maintain friendships.

It’s sick. The world will take this from him very soon.

“I love you Karl, but I’m never going to climb a volcano,” Sapnap says, interrupting their trains of thoughts. “I feel like I’ll end up climbing like, maybe up a tower. Using stairs.”

Karl goes quiet.

“Karl?” Sapnap asks, confused.

“You- say the first part again,” Karl asks him in the same soft tone.

“Oh no, we are not sticking around for this shit George, my McNuggets are getting cold,” Quackity tells George as he drags him away.

George laughs as they sit in the ground and eat cold fast food. Sapnap and Karl join them soon.

“You guys took years to get together, stop acting like the L word is revolutionary,” George tells Karl as Sapnap laughs.

“We had a forbidden romance,” Sapnap protests.

“Wh-How?” George sputters out as Quackity laughs.

“My fair Juliet,” Karl starts, cupping Sapnap’s cheek in his palm. “My love, my light, belonging to the House of Dream, while my loyalties lay in the House of George.”

“We let our feelings fester for sleepless nights,” Sapnap continues dramatically. “But alas, the moment came, and not even the gods themselves could keep me from my beloved.”

They continue the bit in with each other, George attempting to act like his mood wasn’t slightly soured at the reminder of Dream’s existence.

“I bet they practiced this shit all night,” Quackity tells him. “I bet this is what they do when they’re hanging out. Fucking losers.”

“They’re on their theatre kid arcs,” George agrees.

Sapnap and Karl don’t hear them.

Dream called his parents and told them he thinks his roommate is mad at him.

They were pissed.

They chided Dream for even having a roommate, saying he should have filled out the housing forms earlier (how is this information supposed to help him now). They tell him that it’s karma for

Hanging up on his parents for his birthday.

He leaves the conversation more drained than fulfilled.

It’s nine o’clock and George still isn’t home. Dream is worried now and he’s starting to spiral again.

Did George get rid of the money in an attempt to appear less guilty? Was he actually involved in something dangerous?

Now that he thinks about it, there’s no way tutoring pays George that well.

He’s about to get up and do something irrational again when George opens the door.

“Where were you?” Dream asks immediately, forgetting that they’re supposed to be fighting right now.

George doesn’t even look at him, just walks straight into the bathroom and slams the door shut.

When George comes out, he’s in a hoodie and sweatpants and Dream feels the need to say something when George doesn’t make a snarky remark in his direction.

“I’m glad you’re okay,” he tries, but George doesn’t react.

“The debate is very soon, Dream. I look forward to seeing what you come up with,” George says mechanically.

“I’m so prepared dude, you don’t even know,” Dream starts, grinning in an attempt at converting the situation into friendly banter.

“Good,” George says coldly. “I’m going to make a fool out of you.”

Any other year Dream would have leered and said something snarky back.

He looks at George for a moment and his facade drops. George looks hurt, angry. His facial expression twists back into one of indifference.

Dream doesn’t know which one is worse.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY OKAY I KNOW EVERYONE WANTED THEM TO MAKE UP BUT YOU GUYS THE TAGS DOJT SAY I DIDNT WARN YOU /lh

I beat my mile time today! It was kind of poggers

Thank you all so much at the comments and holy shit we are at 672 kudos already?

100 in 4 days? YOURE ALL INSANE thank you for loving this story as much as I love writing it :)

Love hearing u all in the comments (literally tell me about your day if you want I just love hearing about people lol)!!! Thank you all so much and see you in the next one :)

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Weeks fly by before Dream even understands what's happening.

He rarely sees George anymore - they finished the robotics board and didn't speak after that. He's standoffish and guarded, so Dream gives him space. He's told himself that once the debate is over and they've both calmed down, he can try to explain himself.

To distract himself from the guilt, he throws himself into football. They've been on a ridiculous winning spree - they've only collected one loss this entire season. He hears a lot of congratulations in the hallways - from teachers, his peers, even his parents. If he's being honest, the real credit goes to Quackity, who's been killing himself over drafting new plays.

He's gotten a handful of offers from schools he's been in contact with. It's not a decision he feels equipped to make right now. If he's being honest, he's not even sure he wants to play in university. It takes up so much of his time and he doesn't see himself pursuing it professionally. He's got to get around to talking to his parents about that.

The last game of the season is the night after the political forum, and Dream feels incredibly anxious about it all. He goes from practice to research to strategy meetings, trying his best to catch some sleep in between. He's had to put music mentoring on pause altogether. He's sure if robotics was still a pressing concern right now, he'd go insane.

It was all a bit much.

He skips class the day before the debate, convincing himself it's to work. He doesn't work. He lies in bed, counting the number of blemishes on the wall adjacent to him, until he doses out of consciousness.

George has never had so much free time in his life.

There is quite literally nothing to do. He considers getting another job, but his parents bar him from doing so. They still think he works at Billiards, he remembers.

He feels guilty for lying to them. Well, technically it isn't lying, just an omission of truth. It isn't like he isn't working, just not the same way they expect, and he's just not being compensated the way they think he is.

He focuses his energy on preparing for the debate.

He doesn't have it in him to be angry with Dream anymore, who seems to have developed some sort of feeling of regret. He hasn't told anyone anything, which George is appreciative of, even though it's the bare minimum.

Maybe he's being too paranoid about this.

He shakes the thought away and continues looking into why the electoral college is an effective system.

He's also been going to football games which have been admittedly enjoyable. Not that he's too well versed on the game itself, but it's a chance to stay out of his room and hang out with Karl.

The night before the debate, he sleeps in Wilbur's room. He half expects to wake up to everyone knowing his secret. It would've been a good strategy, George thinks to himself. It would definitely throw him off his rhythm, leaving Dream to most likely collect the win.

When he walks into Politics and Economics, still irrelevant as ever, it comes as a relief.

"Hi," Dream tells him.

"Hello," George responds.

He sees Mr. Kennedy looking at the two of them, as if expecting some sort of fight to break out.

"Ready for today?" Dream asks.

"I'm feeling okay about it."

Dream nods and watches as George pulls out his laptop.

"George," Dream starts before he can stop himself. "Can we- can we talk after the debate please? I just--"

"Why?" George asks, raising an eyebrow. "I don't see a reason to."

"I don't know why you're mad at me," Dream starts, folding his arms childishly.

"Maybe because you went through my shit and went prying in my personal life," George responds, his voice steady.

Dream is silent. He was hoping George would forget, somehow.

"Can I at least justify why? I just need you to know why. You don't have to answer any of my questions. I just wanna know."

"Stop trying to get in my head, Dream," George says coldly. "I'm going to go sit with Wilbur."

It's definitely petty and childish, but George cannot have this conversation right now.

After class, Dream excuses himself to walk down to the hotel ten minutes away from the school to meet his parents. He texts his dad a brief "I'm here" to let them know he's at reception, and lets himself be led up to their room.

His mother answers the door, dressed in pyjamas. His father stands up from the desk, where he's scribbling something down on a notepad. He looks up at Dream and smiles, reaching out for a hug.

"How are you Clay?"

He tells them he's good. They talk about football, how life is back in California for the both of them.

"Have you decided on a school?" his mom asks as he adjusts himself on their bed.

"Um, not sure yet. I've gotten a few for football, still waiting on some other offers from non-football schools," Dream says nonchalantly.

"Won't that be stressful for you? Trying out during first year? It's a better idea to just commit to a school that wants to sign you," his mother says.

"Uh, I'm not sure if I wanna play in university yet," Dream tells them. "I might wanna focus on school. Pursue some other things."

It's silent for a second, and Dream immediately knows that it was the wrong day to tell them this because someone is definitely going to pick a fight.

"Well what was the point?" his dad laughs. "Of sending you to Pine Hill? You could've gone to school locally."

"Well, it's kind of academically prestigious outside of football," Dream defends. "I do well in school too. Don't know why I have to be a football player. There's a lot of risks with that."

He's definitely asking for it at this point.

"Stop this," his dad says. "We can talk about this later. Closer to commitment day."

"No, I don't think so," Dream grits out. "I think you need to emotionally prepare for me potentially dropping football."

A beat. He hears his mother sigh.

"No we don't," his dad says. "Because you should have considered this when you were younger, before we invested so much of our time and energy into getting you where you need to be."

"Considered my fucking career?" Dream laughs out. "At what? Age thirteen? I wanted to be a zookeeper at age thirteen, and I'd never even liked animals--"

"Enough."

His dad says it the way he always does whenever he wants to shut down a discussion where Dream is making a point.

"See you at the game," Dream says, standing up abruptly.

"Clay, don't be like that," his mom starts.

"No, I think I will," Dream says as he opens the door and slams it shut as he walks down.

It doesn't matter what they think. At the end of the day, Dream will do what he needs to do to get to where he wants to be. If his parents don't support him, he'll take out loans and do whatever he needs to. He hadn't even said he'd decided for sure he didn't want to play, for fuck's sake. He was just considering it, but apparently he's not even allowed to think for himself.

He's got the debate to worry about, and with George mad at him he's definitely not going to be shown any mercy.

“The electoral college is the only way America can be accurately represented with all fifty states holding an equitable say in that decision-”

“Objection!” Dream shouts out louder than he means to.

He’s so thankful that he decided against telling his parents about this. If they were here he’d probably end up having a nervous breakdown. He feels like he should have researched this more, but he had assumed that George’s limited experience in the United States would give him a leg up.

He was very clearly wrong.

“How is not weighing everyone’s votes equally going to give people equality?”
He knows he’s botched that as he says it.

“If the defendant had listened correctly,” George starts, earning a few scattered laughs from the spectators. “He would have known I referenced equity, not equality.”

He’s getting killed out here. He’s getting killed on the topic of US Politics by a British kid. This is so embarrassing.

They go back and forth for a little while longer, but Dream doesn’t end up making any extraordinary points. George revels in how much of a mess he is - his jabs are quick and clever, he’s a crowd favourite.

When they shake at the end and George is smiling, and Mr. Kennedy reminds everyone that the political forum is a display meant to encourage important conversation, and Dream knows he’s lost. They listen to a few junior students go back and forth on some of their points, but Dream is too caught up in himself.

He knew he shouldn’t have gone. He knew it, he knew it, he knew it.

He’s back in his room early. His team wants to hang out but he can’t face them right now. He hopes and hopes and hopes that George has decided to spend the night with Karl or Wilbur or Quackity or whoever because he can’t deal with it right now.

He’s tired.

He’s so sick of pretending and lying to himself about everything. He’s tired of lying to his parents about wanting to be a football star. Football was fun, but he didn’t want to do it forever. He wanted to do something he enjoyed.

He thinks about calling Sapnap but decides against it. Sapnap already deals with far too many of the same breakdowns that Dream has. He rotates through the same few crises, stays oblivious to stuff that’s actually going on and jumps to conclusions on things he doesn’t understand.

George walks in, yelling a goodbye to Nikolai and Quackity behind him. He seems to be surprised to see Dream in their room and it makes him irrationally angry.

“You gonna talk about how you stole my friends too before you start gloating?” Dream spits at him.

He’s doing it again. Getting angry for no reason, jumping to suggest solutions to things that even he doesn’t believe.

He’s kind of an asshole.

“Well actually, if you have to know-” George starts, but Dream cuts him off.

“No wait, don’t. Don’t say what you were going to say,” he pleads desperately.

George pauses for a moment, before opening his mouth to speak again, but Dream beats him to it.

“I’m sorry George.”

Silence. A beat, another.

“Fuck you, Dream.”

Dream’s heart sinks.

“You have no idea what kind of stress you put me under. At this point I’m not even sure if I care. Tell everyone, go ahead. If it makes you feel like such a big man to pick on people over shit they can’t control-”

What?

“What?” He voices, confused.

“Don’t play dumb,” George tells him, venom in his tone.

“George, why would I go around telling people you have a bag of money and you tutor people?”

George seethes. He fucking seethes. This guy cannot be playing mind games right now.

“Dream, fuck off. I know you’re not stupid and you’ve got it figured out.”

Dream’s heart stops for a moment. Wait.

Is George insinuating he’s right? If the money is supposedly not from tutoring, it must be from some shady happening. George is involved in some sort of drug deal? But why would that be humiliating in the slightest? Unless George is getting messed up on his own supply.

Is George a drug addict? Fuck. This is above his pay grade.

Does George think he’s some kind of asshole that picks on *addicts*?

“George,” Dream starts. “I’d never- seriously man, you think I’m that kind of a person?”

“Well you haven’t given me a reason to believe you aren’t,” George snaps at him.

“I’d never- George. What the fuck man? You seriously think I’d treat you worse for having a *drug addiction*?”

He expects George to lash out and be angry with him for finally saying it out loud. Instead, his eyebrows furrow and his mouth twists into a confused expression.

“What?”

It's Dream's turn to be confused.

“That's what- that's what you've been hiding right? Sneaking away at night? Large bag of cash? You had to get an extra job to sustain the habit,” Dream starts. “No offense, I hope that's not offensive. I don't mean it offensively.”

“Dream.”

“George, I wouldn't tell people about that. That's your business? Is that why you got angry with me?”

“Dream, I'm not addicted to drugs. Are you pulling my leg?”

“Can you please,” Dream starts. “Please, stop speaking in riddles. Just talk to me man. I'm so lost on what's happening. Like, ridiculously lost. I thought your date was a drug deal and that's why I showed up with a car. I thought you were gonna die-”

“Dream, what are you talking about?”

“I don't know!” Dream finally explodes. “I don't fucking know! If you wanna tell me, instead of being cryptic-” he rips the duvet off himself. “-that would be so fucking helpful. Because so far, my theory was drug addict or involved in gang dealings.”

George is having a tough time processing this.

“I'm not involved with drugs. At all.”

Dream exhales. Okay. This is a development for sure. “Good to hear. Still doesn't explain the bag of cash or the disappearing for ridiculous hours, but good to hear.”

“I had a job, dingbat,” George crosses his arms over his chest as he sits on Dream's bed hesitantly. “I had a job, and then switched to just tutoring full time. Some of my clients just need more sessions.”

Dream looks at George like he was crazy.

“That's it?”

“Yeah,” George says.

“Well why were you so standoffish about this fact? Fucking Christ George, I thought you were in danger? Like actual danger!”

“Why did your mind immediately make the conclusion of me being in the mafia?” George asks incredulously.

“I don't know! It made sense at the time! I just didn't want you to be in trouble!”

George feels his stomach do a flip. On one hand, he is still very upset with Dream for messing with his stuff, and apparently tracking his location. On the other hand, Dream had somehow convinced himself that George was in the mafia, and he had dove in headfirst to- to try and save him? On what grounds did Dream think he was qualified to take on the mafia?

It was kind of endearing actually. In the way that you are when your dog accidentally walks into a bush. He's still mad at him though.

He looks at Dream, who's- fuck, is he crying?

"Dream?" he asks, crawling further up on the bed.

Dream is covering his face with one hand, chest heaving up and down. George feels guilty, extremely guilty.

"Hey, are you alright?" he asks again, taking Dream's wrist as softly as he can and pulling it away from his face.

Fuck.

"Sorry, sorry," Dream starts, his voice raspy. "It isn't this. I promise, it isn't this. Us making up or whatever doesn't mean *that* much to me, I promise."

George can't help but laugh.

"—just had a bit of a shit day, and I felt really guilty about putting you through whatever I did, and I didn't even fully understand, and it's just a weight off my shoulders."

George doesn't know what to say - he's not good at comforting people when they're upset. He copies what Dream did with him when he freaked out. He shifts closer, holding Dream's head to his shoulder and runs a hand up and down his back.

"I don't-" Dream starts, but George shushes him.

"Let's wait until you calm down, and then we can talk about it," George says.

Dream nods, his chin pressing down on George's shoulder.

"George? You're not mad at me anymore right?"

He's twisted for this, because he knows that there's not a chance in hell that George would make him feel bad when he's crying on his shoulder. But he wants to be selfish right now - needs some reassurance that there's someone he's spoken to today that isn't disappointed or let down by him.

"No," George says.

"Promise?" he whispers.

George laughs, and Dream feels it in his chest.

"Promise. I'm not mad at you. Even in your wildest dreams."

Dream scoffs, but George feels him smile as he presses his face back into George's shoulder. He's still got a lot of questions —hasn't fully processed Dream's thought process.

They can deal with that tomorrow.

woooo! they did it! they had a conversation *gold star*

hope this chapter was good! it took me a while to figure out my flow and i did a lot of cutting and moving around with it but !!! they finally resolved the misunderstanding (partially) !!!

i also apparently only feel inspiration when i announce to the whole world that i will be taking a little bit of a break. good to know.

another note: i added a tentative chapter count if anyone noticed, but i'll probably end up increasing it if i'm being honest. like, the two of them were supposed to be besties by chapter 10 in my original plan but here we are, chapter 16, finally making some semblance of progress.

thank you to everyone that commented!! i do my best to reply to every single one (this is the part of the author's note where i shamelessly beg you all to talk to me)

hope june is treating everyone well so far! see you all soon in the next one :)

okay okay i'm done now thank you all for reading !!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Dream calms down he wants to talk and explain, but George wants to make him go to bed so he's not dying during the game. Dream argues with him for a while, insisting that regardless, he's not going to be able to sleep now because he'd overthink everything instead of getting some rest anyways. So George lets him talk, and he listens.

Dream admits that although he initially found the bag of money as an accident, he snooped around a little afterwards. He emphasizes he did this only because he thought George was in serious trouble, not to find out more about his personal life.

"You're gone out late sometimes, and I just thought you were involved in something dangerous," he says. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that, it was an invasion of your privacy, but I haven't told anyone about any of my suspicions. Aside from like, telling Sapnap I was worried for you. But I didn't tell him any details or tell him you had that much cash, but I just got so worried, I don't know why."

George looks at him and nods slowly, like he's taking in all this information.

"I don't get why you would drive out to where I was if you supposedly thought I was involved in some shady shit though," George asks.

Dream thinks about this for a moment.

"I didn't want you to die before I decimated you in that debate!" Dream protests. "If I won by default, I wouldn't have full bragging rights."

"Oh, of course, how could I be so selfish?" George says back sarcastically.

"Jokes aside, I didn't actually want you to get hurt. I thought- I don't know, like it wasn't my smartest move, looking back at it, but I just didn't want anything bad to actually happen to you. Like, I talk a lot of shit, but you're not a bad person George, and I don't know, I didn't want to, yeah," Dream finishes lamely.

All he's done is ramble, and his decisions all seem very questionable now that he lines them up, but hindsight is twenty-twenty.

"Well, thank you for explaining," George says, patting him on the back as Dream goes to untangle himself from him, suddenly very embarrassed.

"Regardless, it *was* a bit of an invasion of privacy. I'm going to need a little time," George tells him.

Dream nods understandingly, but he still feels a little disappointed.

George feels bad too, for assuming the worst of Dream when Dream had supposedly been just trying to see if he was okay. He's still not sure if he's actually mad at him.

They go to bed, and when George wakes up, Dream has already left to prepare for the football game. He contemplates going, unsure if it was the best idea. Regardless, he ends up in the technical area, next to Quackity, who's given him the very important task of holding onto two clipboards. Quackity appears stressed; they're down one point, and they're down to less than a minute.

"We need to send this bitch into *overtime*," Quackity tells George, yanking clipboards into and out of his arms.

"Yeah, do that," George says in what he hopes is an encouraging tone.

"I don't understand why the fuck Dream is hesitating," Quackity says furiously, as he looks through the papers for something. "Whatever. He'll pull through. I'm not gonna kick him while he's down."

George can't help but feel guilty, unsure if Dream's poor performance is his fault or not.

When they score in the last bit and the clock gets set to overtime, Quackity hollers and cheers loudly. He runs onto the field, where the team is gathered in a huddle and begins wildly gesturing around them as he gives them instructions. George watches from a distance, feeling awkward.

He should call home soon, he thinks. His sister has been begging for him to get on the phone for a while, but debate preparation had taken over his life for a bit. He's got no pressing matters, and no excuses, so he should probably do that after the game.

He hears the team cheer and throw their fists up, and Quackity finally banishes him to the bleachers when he returns. He squints until he can see Karl, and then runs up the steps to sit next to him.

"Clipboard duty?" Karl asks him and George nods.

"Oh man, I was there during the game that they lost, the one you didn't come to- he was furious, George. I thought I was a dead man," Karl tells him, offering him a bag of barbecue potato chips.

Pine Hill scores a point, all they have to do is hold off the other team for seventy seconds. George stops chewing mid-chip out of anticipation as the bleachers go silent.

They take the win. Everyone stands and cheers, including George. The sound is deafening. Karl practically leaps over him, grabbing the sleeve of his hoodie as he drags the two of them onto the field. He lets go as soon as he spots Sappnap, who's been hoisted onto Dream's and Nikolai's shoulders in celebration.

"Catch him, Karl!" Dream yells as they see Karl approach, bracing himself to toss Sappnap.

"No, don't fucking-" Sappnap starts, as he's tossed towards Karl.

Sappnap lands on his feet shakily, grabbing onto Karl's shoulders to find his balance. Karl wraps an arm around him to help stabilize him, and George turns away as fast as he can because he doesn't want to see it.

"Congratulations," he tells Dream, smiling.

“Awe, no soldier who came home from war style kiss for me?” Dream asks him, running a hand through his hair.

“I’m just kidding,” he adds, at the soured expression on George’s face. “Unless?”

“You’re such an idiot,” George says, rolling his eyes. “I don’t even want to be near you while you’re all sweaty and gross like this.”

Dream grins at him, eyes lighting up as he steps forward.

“Dream, don’t,” George warns. “I’m still upset with you.”

“Okay? You’re always upset with me,” Dream brushes off, clearly back to his normal, overconfident, asshole behaviour. “But I’ll be nice.”

“Wow, thank you, don’t know how I’ll ever repay you for your kindness,” George says sarcastically.

“Maybe we should shake hands,” Dream says, extending his hand.

George wants to ask if he’s serious right now, but Dream looks at him, egging him on to shake his hand, so he does it. Big mistake.

Dream yanks him forward and engulfs him in a disgustingly humid embrace.

“Dream! Get off me!” George shouts, feeling himself go red in embarrassment.

“No, I don’t think I will,” Dream says, wrapping his arms tighter around George’s shoulders. “I don’t know why you’re embarrassed, we’ve hugged before.”

By now the majority of the bleachers have cleared out, and the only people still lingering are people on the team so it isn’t like they’re being watched, but George still feels embarrassed.

“I’m gonna kill you, hop off me,” George says, trying to squirm out of his grasp.

“Clay,” a voice from behind them calls.

Dream immediately removes his arms from around George, and turns to look at his dad. He feels himself go hot with embarrassment.

“Hi dad,” he says. “Did you enjoy the game?”

George steps away a little awkwardly.

“It was fine,” his mom says. “Who’s this?”

She gestures towards George.

“Oh, uh, this is my roommate, George. We do robotics together,” Dream says, crossing his fingers that they don’t say anything that he wouldn’t want them to say.

“Oh, nice to meet you!” his mom says, smiling.

“It’s nice to meet you too, ma’am, sir,” George says, waving.

“We won’t hold you any longer dear, go join your friends,” Dream’s mom says, and George turns

to see that thankfully, Sapnap, Quackity and Karl have waited for him.

George says a second goodbye to both of his parents and runs off to join the rest of his friends.

Dream's dad laughs.

"That explains so so much," he says to Clay, who clenches his fists.

"Explains why you weren't upset about not getting to live in the Ivory Towers," his dad starts. "At first, I wasn't sure why you weren't crushed, because you made it sound like it was so important that you got to live there. It's because you got a *roommate*."

His mother puts a hand on his father's shoulder.

"And then you were so upset that he was mad at you, and your mother and I thought it was a little odd because you hadn't even mentioned the two of you were friends."

"Stop," Dream says. "It's not like that."

"And then," his dad continues. "Then, you became disinterested in football, wanting to pursue other things. It's because of that boy, isn't it?"

"George? No, what? We're not even friends!"

"I'm sure you're more than friends," his dad says coldly. "You looked pretty friendly before we came to talk to you."

Dream exhales loudly. "It isn't like that at all, you know it's not--"

"Do I? Do I know, Clay? You barely talk to us."

"Yeah, cause I'm so busy with football and robotics and maintaining my GPA that I don't have any fuckin' time! Anytime I try to talk to you you get confrontational and start making assumptions about how everything I do has been influenced by someone else. Maybe, just maybe, I've got my own plans and ideas that I've developed by myself!" he says, raising his voice.

"Don't shout at your father," his mother says. "Talk this out civilly."

"If you guys wanted to talk to me, maybe you shouldn't have shipped me off to boarding school," Dream spits.

"This isn't about boarding school, don't change the subject," his dad says.

"Isn't it though? It's about how having a gay son wasn't part of the plan," he starts, stepping away from them.

"Clay, that's not it," his mom tries to butt in, but he doesn't let her.

"It's about how what the world says is more important than how I feel, but it's whatever. Even if I was dating George, or any boy at all, I wouldn't tell you," Dream says, trying to keep his voice steady. "I'm gonna go find my team so I can celebrate my win. Have a nice flight back."

"Don't do this here, let's talk about it!" his mom calls after him.

Dream is already sprinting.

The phone only rings twice before she picks it up.

“Hey Tilly,” he says, smiling into the camera.

Tilly glowers at him.

“So glad you’ve finally found the time,” she says, sounding unimpressed with him.

“C’mon, not all of us are still in grade four with no responsibilities,” he presses, as Tilly’s mouth falls open in offence.

“Mum! He called me a - take that back! I’m in *year* nine, for your information. *Grade four*, I don’t even know what that means, but I’m sure it’s wrong.”

“I’m never wrong,” George says with a grin.

“You’re baiting me into being angry,” Tilly says, but finally smiling back at him. “Still an asshole regardless of the time zone you’re in, huh George?”

He hears his mum chide her for her language, and Tilly argues back.

George misses them a lot.

Tilly tells him about school - how everything is a bit of a mess, how Sarah is the only person she likes, how much the history teacher hates her.

“What’s up with you?” she asks. “Any new developments for anything? What about your roommate, is he still an asshole?”

George hesitates. Tilly takes this as a clue to jump to conclusions, her eyes widening as she adjusts herself in her seat.

“Oh my god, you totally- you’re *trying it on* with him!” She whispers.

“Stop! Why does everyone keep saying that?” George protests, running a hand through his hair as he debated whether or not he wanted to tell Tilly about this.

“Everyone loves a good movie moment,” Tilly tells him. “But tell me more.”

He decides to tell her. It takes ages to get through the misunderstandings that Dream and him have already sorted out, and he’s unsure if any still exist. Tilly listens patiently, for the first time George can remember. He hesitates on telling her that Dream is into men, knowing that this information would spur some out of control reaction from her, where she’d try to convince George to get married to him. Surprisingly, she contains herself well.

“He wanted to fight a gang for you? You’re joking, you’re making this up George, no way,” Tilly cracks up.

“I’m not joking! He had stuff stashed away too! And he doesn’t think that it’s an insane thing to assume, doesn’t get why I’m so hung up on it,” George gasps out, in tears from laughing as well.

“There’s no way.”

“It’s true! I was there!”

“Sure George,” Tilly snickers.

“I don’t know what I should do about this whole entire thing,” he admits. “I feel like- I’m not mad at him surprisingly, which I feel like I should be.”

“You cannot get mad at him!” Tilly exclaims. “There’s no way you can get mad at him!”

“Why can’t I? He went through all my things, Tilly!”

“He was trying to *save* you from the mafia, bless him!” she says, still trying to control her laughter.

“He thought you were in trouble and instead of calling the police he arranged a little *getaway*. That’s the cutest thing I’ve ever heard. I don’t want a boyfriend unless he does that for me.”

“Okay, calm down,” George tells her, and she rolls her eyes at him.

“Yeah yeah, you can go ahead and still pretend to be upset with him because your ego is wounded, but c’mon, the guy potentially was prepared to risk his life for you. You don’t get to call him your shitty roommate anymore. That’s your partner in crime. The two of you are like, best friends in denial.”

George laughs out loud at that.

He thinks about it for a moment, just to indulge Tilly. They fight all the time, sure, but it’s never serious. They’re just both very dramatic. Dream has also seen him have a breakdown, and never brought it up to spite him, which is the bare minimum, but pretty impressive for the guy who you’ve mutually hated for three years.

“Also,” Tilly starts. “For the record, I would just like to point out that you telling me he’s into men had nothing to do with your stupid little catfight,” Tilly points out gleefully.

“What? Yes it does!” George protests, wracking his brain for a follow up to that statement.

“No, no it doesn’t, George. I’m not saying anything, but I’m saying that he just seems well intentioned but stupid. Kind of like you. And I’m not saying you like him either, but there were a lot of details in this retelling that didn’t need to be there. I think you guys have hated each other so much you came full circle and became friends.”

It makes sense when she says it like that. It always freaks George out when Tilly says something wise, because she’s thirteen and should probably be wasting her time doing more brainless things. Like eating dirt, or frolicking outside. Whatever thirteen year olds do.

“Potentially, maybe more. Only kidding...Or am I?” Tilly announces in her best movie commentator voice.

“I’d hit you if you were next to me right now,” George says.

“Sure. You’ve been talking about this guy and how much you hate him for years. If anything, I deserve compensation,” Tilly responds, leaning back in her chair coyly.

“Y’know I met his parents today?” George realizes. “It was so embarrassing.”

Tilly rolled her eyes.

“Oh, do tell, George. We’d all love to hear it.”

Chapter End Notes

dream CANNOT catch a break huh. who's idea was that
hope everyone is doing well! i know a lot of people have graduated, so congratulations
to you if you have. updates going forward may be a little more spaced out (or maybe
not because every time i've said that i've uploaded regularly tbh) - a lot is happening in
my personal life right now and i'm just trying to deal with it one step at a time
also the SECOND HAND EMBARRASSMENT of parents or adults seeing you flirt??
its so bad im so sorry to everyone thats witnessed or been a victim to it its the worst.
as always, hope everyone is doing well, thank you for the love on the previous chapter
and i love hearing your thoughts so feel free to comment :)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Football season ends, as does college essay season, and they place first at the regional robotics competition. There's a cool down period where there isn't really too much to do.

The original plan was to ignore Dream for a little bit, but it turns out that boredom is a killer. George requested space, and minus right after the football game, Dream has been very respectful of that. He doesn't talk to George unless George talks to him, he doesn't try to see how many sticky notes he can get on the back of George's blazer before George notices during Politics and Economics. Occasionally, he'll look at George like a kicked puppy, but that's as far as his attempts at persuasion go.

George caves after six days. It's a lovely afternoon, there isn't very much to get done, and it's his turn to try and get Dream's attention the only way he knows.

By picking a fight.

So he walks over to Dream's bed, where he's intently staring at something on his laptop.

"What're you watching?" George asks, deliberately messing up the covers as he climbs to sit next to him.

Dream pauses it and looks over at George in confusion for a moment before responding.

"Uh, last year's March Madness," Dream says, angling his screen so George can look at it.

"Can I see?" George asks, taking the laptop before Dream can even respond, and closing it.
"Awesome, thank you."

"What was that for?" Dream asks incredulously, but he's smiling.

"You've been ignoring me," George states matter of factly.

He can practically see the gears inside Dream's head turning, crafting a double entendre to this.

"Well, yeah, that's what you asked for, space," Dream settles on, and George is almost disappointed.

"You can do better than that, c'mon," George goads, and Dream laughs like he's the ridiculous one here.

"George, are you trying to pick a fight?" Dream asks him, and George feels very much insane when he spells it out like that.

"I'm just bored," he says in response, refusing to answer the question.

"So what you're saying is you like talking to me," Dream says, leaning forward like he always does when he's trying to intimidate George into backing down.

"No, I'm saying I require intellectual stimulation," George responds while rolling his eyes, willing his entire body to stay in place as he looks anywhere but Dream's face.

The junction of where Dream's neck meets collarbone is really nice for a football player. Typically, it's all muscly and raised and reminds him of a frilled-neck lizard, but Dream's is nicer than the average person's. It's a sharp slope downwards, defined lines. Pleasantly acute. Which is a really weird thing to think about, he realizes.

"You require *stimulation*?" Dream asks him. "Come on, you're baiting me. Even you know that one was too easy."

"Look who's talking about too easy," George quips back, very pleased with himself.

"Okay, fair, that's a good one," Dream admits, running a hand through his hair. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like I'm forgiven."

"Something like that," George agrees. "The emotional manipulation bit where you pretended to be my friend really paid off."

It's a joke, but Dream looks upset the second he says it.

"I wasn't pretending y'know, you actually don't suck all the time when you decide to take that stick out of your ass," Dream tells him, and George slaps his arm halfheartedly in protest.

"There's nothing to do," George sighs, laying down, placing his head at the foot of Dream's bed so that their bodies are parallel but they can still look at each other.

"Yeah. I wanted to go out with Sapnap today actually, but Karl has stolen him from me," Dream says.

"Tell me about it," George sighs. "We should break them up."

"Parent Trap style," Dream says offhandedly.

"What's that?"

Dream shoots into a sitting position, looking at George bewilderedly.

"You've never seen The Parent Trap?"

"No, was I supposed to?"

"Um, yeah you were supposed to, what the fuck is wrong with you?"

Dream grabs his laptop and yanks it open with such haphazardness it makes George want to punt him across the room. He doesn't get time to voice this urge though, because Dream is talking a mile a minute about the plot of the movie while typing.

"I thought this movie was huge worldwide, you should've already seen it," Dream tells him again.

"I'm just not a huge movie person," George tells him, which seems to offend Dream even further.

"Are you here or home for the Christmas break?" Dream asks.

"Here," George says. "It's too much of a hassle to fly home and get adjusted to the timezones and fly back."

"I'm here too," Dream says. "We can watch a bunch of movies, I'm going to convert you."

Dream is silent for a moment.

“Only if you want to though.”

“Well, if I’ve got to spend time with you, it’s better if I don’t have to hear you talk,” George teases, and Dream grins at him.

“You love hearing me talk, don’t lie,” he says as George shifts to sit next to him. “See George? Isn’t being nice to each other so much more fun than fighting for no reason?”

He thinks for a moment.

“No, not really,” George states as the Walt Disney Pictures logo pulls up on the screen.



They end up at an ice skating the next weekend, as per Sapnap’s request. Dream really did not want to go, and George can’t seem to understand why.

“Come on, it’s skating! Everyone likes skating,” George says, and Dream shakes his head no.

“I’m sick, George, tell him I’m sick and I can’t come,” Dream states.

“I’m not doing that, you’re coming,” George says, finality in his tone as he tosses Dream his toque.

As the weather gets colder, Dream gets grumpier, complaining about how he doesn’t like the feeling of having frozen fingertips and his nose turning red.

“If it makes you feel better, I can’t tell when your nose turns red,” George says as they walk towards the back exit of The Lighthouse.

It doesn’t do much, but Dream at least tries to act like this information is encouraging. When they see Sapnap’s car, Dream wants to head back inside and call this whole thing off.

“Dream! It’s ice skating, not bungee jumping!” George says, grabbing his wrist and attempting to drag the both of them towards Sapnap’s car. “Quit acting like a dog that doesn’t want to take a bath.”

They both enter through opposite back doors of the car, Quackity tries to get out. George realizes what he’s doing immediately.

“Nuh uh, stay there, you’re taking the middle seat,” George tells him.

“That is not fair,” Quackity says, violently trying to shove George out of the car.

“Yes it is! You can’t put Dream in the middle, he’s too big!”

“Oh yeah, I can *vouch* for that,” Sapnap says from the driver’s seat.

“I’m leaving,” George threatens.

“I’m leaving too, great idea George,” Dream says, going to open the door again but Sapnap locks

the doors.

“What is with you?” George asks, struggling to do his seatbelt as Quackity makes it his mission to sit with his legs as widely open as possible.

“He’s horrible at ice skating,” Sapnap says, grinning. “Like, whatever you think it is, however bad you’re imagining, it’s worse.”

This news delights George more than anything else possibly ever could.

“It can’t be that bad,” George says, offering Dream a reassuring smile, to which Karl snorts.

“It absolutely is,” Quackity responds as Dream throws his head back in humiliation, covering his face with his gloved hand. “It was ridiculous. There were three year olds better than him out there.”

“I don’t understand why you would stand on blades and try to move on ice. It’s kind of a ridiculous concept if you think about it,” Dream tries, and the car erupts into noises of disagreement.

“Football is stupid too if you cut it down to its bare essentials, you’re just running with a ball,” Karl argues.

“Yeah, but there’s strategy involved in football,” Dream defends himself.

The argument continued the entire drive, and the volume gets unacceptable way too many times. George watches as they pull up to the outdoor skating rink. He’s never been to this one before, and it’s very cute.

There are fairy lights strung along the fence around the rink, and two mini pine trees planted in the center. Only a dozen or so people are already there. They’re all in pairs, holding hands.

They grab skates from the rental and sit down to lace them up. There’s a handful of kids watching the ice mournfully.

“Oh fuck,” Sapnap says. “It’s couples skating hour right now, so-”

“There’s five of us,” Dream interrupts him. “We can’t do the same thing as last year.”

“Like last year?” George asks.

“They do this thing and call it couples skating hour, but it’s really just no children or losers skating hour,” Quackity explains. “They’ve changed the rules, I checked the website just for you, Dream. You just need to be paired or tripled up with someone as you skate, and you need to be over the age of thirteen. Last year, I had the *pleasure* of being Dream’s partner.”

“I wasn’t that bad-”

“Yes you were. I’m not going through that again.”

“Then that’s perfectly fine! You can go with George, and I can watch, let’s not disrupt the serenity of the rink today,” Dream says.

“Yeah, I bet you’d watch,” George mutters, and Quackity cackles.

“No, he’s right. Let him sit it out for a bit. The hour ends very soon anyways, and then we can all watch a six foot something man get freaked out by ice.”

Dream doesn't even respond to the insult, just props himself up on the bench, happily waving at George, Quackity, Sapnap, and Karl as they make their way onto the ice.

"I see you and Dream have made up," Quackity notes.

"Yeah," George says, taking Quackity's wrist gingerly.

They watch Karl and Sapnap pass the two of them, fingers intertwined. Karl spins Sapnap around.

"They're such show offs together," George grumbles. "I liked it better when they were pining and I didn't have to see it."

"Awe, it's okay George, you'll find someone who's willing to love you and your bad attitude one day," Quackity teases.

George shoves him with his shoulder, which Quackity dodges, sending George stumbling for a moment before he catches his balance.

"You're on Dream duty, by the way, when the hour is over," Quackity tells him. "I've done my time, and I'd rather die if I'm being honest."

They look over at Dream, who waves at them from the bench, looking very pleased with himself.

"He can't be that bad," George says, trying to convince himself. "Can't we all help him?"

"Oh, he absolutely is," Quackity laughs. "And no. Karl and Sapnap won't, and I won't, so you will."

"I can teach him," George responds.

"I'll give you a million dollars if you manage to do that," Quackity tells him.

They talk for a bit as they go in circles. Quackity tells him he's planning on double majoring in communications and political science, if everything goes to plan. George sneaks a glance at Dream, who's anxiously staring at the countdown to normal skate opening back up. When the buzzer rings and the kids start walking back onto the rink, Quackity pats his shoulder.

"That's your cue. Go help Dream onto the ice," he says before turning around and skating alarmingly fast towards Karl and Sapnap, ducking underneath their joint hands and placing himself in the middle, wrapping an arm around both of their shoulders.

George makes his way to where Dream is standing, two shaky arms balancing himself on the ledge.

"You've stalled enough," George tells him.

"Don't laugh," Dream says as George extends a hand to help him.

"I won't as long as you try not to fall on top of me," George promises.

Dream's hand finds his and George pulls him forward. He doesn't anticipate the lack of balance and George finds his face in Dream's shoulder.

"Sorry, sorry," Dream says, reaching out to grab the railing. "I'm not as bad as last year though. My mission is to not fall."

George tries his best not to wince at the death grip Dream has on his arm. He ducks himself underneath Dream's elbow, so that he can act as a crutch.

"You've got to promise me that if you do fall, you fall backwards and act as a cushion," George tells him, trying to propel the both of them forward miserably.

"Sure thing, princess," Dream says sarcastically.

Dream holds onto the railing every time George moves.

"You cannot be calling me a princess when you're acting like this," George says in disbelief.

Quackity, Karl and Sapnap zoom past them, racing each other.

"You should go, I'll sit on the bench and make sure nobody takes our stuff," Dream tries to convince him.

"Nobody wants your stupid scarf, I promise," George says, pushing them away from the railing.

Dream wraps his free arm around George immediately, engulfing him in a suffocating hug.

"Dream, as sweet as this is, I can't fucking see," George says, grabbing his wrists.

Dream's legs are trembling like a baby deer's and George gets an idea.

"Wrap your arms around my waist," he says, and Dream listens without protest or a snarky comment.

Sapnap is skating past them, and George grabs onto the hood of his jacket without warning. Sapnap pulls the three of them forward.

"George, what the fuck," Dream says as they barrel forward, but he loosens his hold on him over time.

"See," George tells him. "It isn't even that bad."

He sets Sapnap free after a little while, and Dream takes his hand.

"Okay, this isn't as bad as I originally thought," Dream admits. "You're still going to have to hold my hand though, don't let go."

"You just want an excuse to hold my hand," George says as he starts to skate, Dream being dragged behind him.

"I do *not*! I just want to not fall over," Dream says. "Stop trying to hit on me as a joke, it's only funny when you're bad at it."

"Well, I'm not gonna sit here and just listen to you, so who's fault is it really?" George asks as they keep going, abysmally slow.

It's embarrassing when an eight year old passes them, but George doesn't comment.

"Yours," Dream says stubbornly. "I'm supposed to get under your skin. It's my job."

They're doing fine for a bit, and eventually Dream starts to move his legs.

“I don’t even remember why we started fighting,” George admits.

“It’s because you never wanted to hang out with me,” Dream says after thinking for a moment. “I’d invite you out all the time but you’d be such a bitch about it.”

“I’m a little awkward,” George defends himself.

“I know that now,” Dream snorts. “Idiot.”

George lunges forward faster, and Dream’s arms are around his shoulders again as he apologizes profusely and begs George to continue at their deplorably slow speed, shooting apologetic looks at people who have to skate around them.

When the hour is up, Karl goes to return all their skates, Sappnap is making fun of Dream for being a big fucking baby, and Quackity picks a fight with George over where they want to go to eat afterwards.

They end up at a Wendy’s, which was nobody’s first choice. Dream stands in front of George in line and pays for him before he can protest as a thank you, to which George yells at him for doing.

“You hate it when I’m nice to you and you hate it when I’m mean to you, can you pick one?” Dream asks as George huffs.

It’s lovely outside today, despite the initial chill. A Glee cover of some Christmas song plays on overhead speakers.

“It’s way too early to be playing Christmas music,” George tells him.

“Never too early for Christmas music,” Dream disagrees.

He feels like there’s something there that means something, but he’s tired from holding onto George’s arm all afternoon, so he chooses not to think about it.

Chapter End Notes

hello guys - sorry this update took a little longer to get out. i deadass forgot what this entire story was about so i had to reread it
rock bottom is me desperately to describe the slope of a faceless man's shoulders at 11 am on a thursday morning. honestly, not what i envisioned myself doing, but regardless we move
i'm almost done with school, so updates and more stories will come more frequently after that! thank you all for your patience, and thank you all for the very nice comments :) it makes me so happy to see so many of you like this story enough to take time out of your days to tell me and not to sound like a sop but yeah
see you all in the next one! <3

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You seemed to enjoy yourself when we went skating,” Sapnap says as Dream attempts to balance two highlighters on top of each other.

“Yeah, wasn’t that bad! I think I’ve gotten better,” Dream says, squinting as he lines up the bottom of the pink one to the top of the yellow one.

It’s true. He has improved.

“No, you were still pretty bad, George just let you hang onto him the whole time,” Sapnap laughs.

“Sorry, not all of us are training for the *figure skating Olympics*,” Dream mocks. “You and Karl are such show offs! It was not necessary to start doing figure eights on the ice. You could’ve hurt one of the kids, y’know.”

Sapnap and Karl are obnoxious like that. They call themselves a power couple and say it’s ironic but him, George and Quackity know it’s not. They mean it every single time. Bastards.

“Dude, we both know you don’t care about the children,” Sapnap scoffs. “Or you wouldn’t have subjected them to whatever that position you were in with George.”

Position? With *George*? What?

“What?” Dream sputters out. “What do you- what are you talking about?”

“Don’t play dumb,” Sapnap laughs. “You were all over him!”

“Was not!” Dream protests, feeling himself turn red.

It wasn’t weird. George had offered, or had been forced into helping him. They didn’t even do anything odd.

“And then you did that whole scene at Wendy’s - *Oh George, let me pay! No, no George, don’t you ever worry! I can provide for the both of us. Let me prove it by paying for your four for four -*” Sapnap mocks in a high pitched voice.

Dream uncaps and throws the pink highlighter at his head to cut him off.

Okay, so maybe it was just a position that appeared to be better suited for two people that were romantically involved. That didn’t mean anything, and also didn’t account for the fact that Dream is a shitty skater.

“Relax!” Sapnap yelps as it hits him on the nose. “I was just kidding, dude.”

Dream feels a lick of satisfaction when he sees that Sapnap’s nose has a swatch of bubblegum pink on it. That’s not washing off very easily.

“George and I are friends, it would be so weird to like him,” Dream defends himself.

“For sure,” Sapnap says, going back to scrolling on his phone.

Dream doesn't like George, and people should stop insinuating that. He wasn't a kid. If he did like George, he would tell him, and handle the answer like an adult. But he doesn't need to worry about that because he doesn't like George.

"It's normal for friends to touch," Dream states.

"I was just pulling your leg, dude," Sapnap says. "I don't actually think you like George."

For some reason, that offends Dream.

"I do like George," Dream says. "I just don't have feelings for him."

"Okay, I believe you," Sapnap says, and the conversation technically ends there, but Dream has never been particularly good at shutting up.

"It's normal, we've just been mean to each other for a really long time so we're making up for it," Dream states. "It's completely normal."

"It *is* normal," Sapnap agrees. "That's what I said."

Sapnap is planting ideas in his head that don't need to be there.

"My dad thought I was dating him," Dream mentions offhandedly.

Sapnap turns off his phone and looks at him with concern. "Oh no, how'd that even come up?"

"After the football game," Dream says. "We were lingering around, and then they showed up - my parents, I mean - and then when he left my dad was like, are you dating him? He was pissed dude. Remember that scene in the Goblet of Fire where Dumbledore grabs Harry by the shoulders and goes 'Harry! DID YOU PUT YOUR NAME IN THE GOBLET OF FIRE?' It felt like that."

Sapnap raises his eyebrows. "Shit, I'm sorry."

Dream shrugs. "It's alright, don't have to answer to him much longer. He's just pissed I might not do football in college."

"Have you made a decision about that yet?" Sapnap asks, and Dream shakes his head no.

"I have until February to make that decision, I don't wanna worry about it right now," Dream says, waving his hand.

"That's in a few weeks, dude," Sapnap says, but Dream shakes his head no. "Alright, never mind."

Dream has plenty of time to figure everything out. There are weeks lying ahead of him, not to mention all the free time he'll have once school is over for the winter break. He'll be fine. He'll make the right decision for himself.

The best decisions are made last minute. He'll know what he wants when the time comes for it. For now he has more important things to worry about. Like what he's going to have for lunch, or if George took notes for the political unrest unit, because he did not.

"I hate this," Dream groans, throwing his head back.

He's sat at the robotics meeting next to the two other senior girls as George stands at the front of the room with their teacher.

The national robotics competition was the bane of his existence. Not actually, but he needs something to antagonize right now. The organization had changed the requirements for the dimension of the robot, and they were stuck trying to find a way to rework their design so that they still qualified.

George doesn't want to rework their design. George wants to order a few smaller parts, and rebuild the whole thing.

"The hardest part was the blueprint," George justifies as the other members eye him warily. "Remaking it will be easier than changing the design and having to remake it."

Nobody wants to go through the hell that was that wiring job ever again, least of all Dream and George.

"George, we just don't have the time," his teacher tries, but George shakes his head no.

Dream admires that about him. It pisses him off when George uses it against him, but George is exceptionally stubborn when he knows he's correct. And George is correct right now. It's the only way to maximize efficiency, but it's going to be a pain in the ass.

"May I make a proposition?" George offers.

He's such a dork, Dream thinks to himself. He takes this so seriously. It's endearing in an irritating way.

When the teacher motions for George to continue, he looks directly at Dream, which can't be good.

"Dream and I will take care of eighty percent of the wiring, as long as the rest of you work on most of the written report."

"A counter proposition, if you will, George," the girl sitting next to Dream, Amanda, says. "You and Dream do all of the wiring, and we'll make sure the report is done."

Dream looks between her and George.

"That's fine with me if it's fine with Dream," George says, looking to him for an answer.

"Uh, yeah," Dream says dumbly.

Usually George gets very controlling with the written report, so him relinquishing control comes as a surprise. When they're walking to get dinner after the meeting, Dream asks him.

"Any reason in particular you wanted to work on the wiring?" Dream inquires. "You usually stay away from doing hardware anything."

"I do," George agrees. "But I'm sick of reading and revising technical shit."

George tells him about the scare they had with the junior team, where they had ended up writing two hundred words instead of two thousand for the report, and how they had to scramble to get it done in two days.

“It ended okay in the end,” George finishes. “They did good. Gold in efficiency, gold in speed, and bronze in endurance. Was hoping for at least a silver there, but the revisions they’ve made should get them there for nationals.”

“If you need help with the juniors, let me know,” Dream offers. “Football season is over, so I’ve got a lot more spare time.”

“They’ll be okay, but thank you,” George says, smiling at him.

He watches as George squints up at the chalkboard where today’s menu is written.

“Isn’t this weird?” Dream blurts out.

George turns to him and tilts his head in confusion.

“We couldn’t even stand each other for so long,” Dream continues. “I don’t even know why. Now we spend so much time together. Maybe if you weren’t so initially judgemental-”

“How was I initially judgemental?” George asks in disbelief, and Dream laughs at him. “No, don’t laugh, tell me.”

They bicker all the way to the lunch table, where Sapnap and Quackity are sat playing cards. When they sit down, Sapnap turns to them and grins.

“What’re the two of you doing during spring break?”

George shrugs.

“Not too sure, might go home, why?” Dream asks.

“We were thinking of travelling,” Quackity says. “A camping trip in California or Nevada, we haven’t decided. Are you guys in?”

“All of us?” Dream asks, and Quackity nods. “I’m down, if the weather’s nice. George?”

“Uh, yeah,” George says. “That sounds fun. I’ll let you guys know.”

Quackity launches into a tirade about how his Calculus teacher is a real bitch.

“He cut six marks from my test because I forgot to box my answers, what an asshole,” he spits. “If I see him outside of this school, I’ll do his head in.”

Sapnap goads him on. George turns to Dream and smiles before turning back to watch Quackity become increasingly violent in his speech.

“You okay?” Dream whispers.

“Yeah,” George says back. “Just thinking about what we need to get done tonight in order to be done ahead of time. Because if we want to finish marking up the new board, we’ll have to start by eight, and it’s already seven, which means we have to leave in forty five minutes.”

“You worry too much,” Dream says, and George scowls at him.

“I’m being practical,” George insists, and Dream rolls his eyes.

Turns out as usual, George was right for making sure they started working earlier. The sized down wires are a bitch to work with.

“Let’s take a break,” Dream pleads, and George shakes his head no.

“I plan to go to bed before three in the morning, thanks Dream,” George says, but Dream has other ideas.

“Let’s play a game,” Dream tries again. “Just for twenty minutes. Then you won’t hear a word out of me unless it’s robotics related for the rest of the night. Promise.”

George sighs. “Fine.”

Dream doesn’t expect George to give in so easily, but he’s not going to complain and risk George going back on his word.

“What about twenty one questions?” Dream asks.

“Not in the mood to think,” George states, standing up from beside him and going to sit on the floor.

Dream follows him, crossing his legs as he sits directly across from George.

“Truth or dare?”

“We aren’t in middle school,” George quips back.

Dream rolls his eyes. “You have a problem with everything.”

“No, you just have bad game ideas,” George says back. “Suggest something interesting.”

Dream is all out of ideas. George reaches for his water bottle.

“Wait, don’t move,” he says, and George freezes. “I have an idea.”

“What’s the idea?” George asks.

“I’ll pour the water into your mouth,” Dream starts, and George is already shaking his head no.

“You’ll end up drowning me!” George remarks incredulously. “How is that a game?”

“Hear me out, just hear me out this time,” Dream pleads.

“No, I think you just want to-”

“Okay, gross, *don’t* finish that sentence,” Dream laughs out. “I swear, George, just-”

Dream lunges forward to swipe the bottle from George’s hand, but George sees him coming and slides backwards. Dream’s chin lands on George’s knee and he curses in pain.

“That hurt,” he complains as George laughs. “It’s not funny, don’t laugh, you sadist.”

“It was really funny, actually,” George says, and Dream glares at him.

“It’s a trust exercise,” Dream tells him. “I have to pour it in your mouth and you have to pour it in mine. It’s proof that we can trust each other!”

“Why can’t we do something normal? Like trust falls?” George asks, and Dream nearly laughs out loud at that.

“Like you’re going to be able to hold me up.”

“I can too,” George protests.

“George, c’mon, it’ll be a fun bonding exercise. You can do it to me too,” Dream promises.

George thinks for a moment. “Fine, but I want to go first.”

“That’s fine,” Dream says, lowering himself onto the floor.

George shuffles closer, rising up onto his knees and stretching so he can hover above Dream. Dream hunches down as George picks up his water bottle and tilts his chin upwards with two gentle fingers.

“Ready?” George asks, and Dream sticks out his tongue, grinning.

“You’re disgusting, stop!” George groans as he lets go of Dream, going bright red.

Dream laughs before, and George pours a sip’s worth of water into his mouth.

George watches him as he swallows.

“That wasn’t so bad, see!” Dream says. “My turn, now.”

“There’s no point to this, I don’t feel any difference in how much I trust you,” George protests, but he still lowers himself to the ground.

“It makes so much of a difference,” Dream insists, swishing the water currently in the bottle around for dramatic effect. “I already feel like I trust you a thousand times more.”

He goes to pour the water into George’s mouth.

“Shut up,” George says as he does so, which sends him into a sputtering, coughing mess.

Dream panics. “George!”

He slaps George over the back twice in an attempt to help, before George shoves him off.

“Ow, you asshole,” George croaks, but he continues laughing. “That was so your fault.”

“How was that my fault? You’re the one who started laughing for no reason!” Dream says.

George grabs the bottle of water and sloshes the remaining amount onto the front of Dream’s shirt.

“This is war, George,” Dream declares, reaching forward to grab him.

George *squeals* in a way that sounds animalistic as he moves away from Dream. Dream loses his balance and slips, groaning as his chest hits the floor. As he moves to flip himself over, George attacks, pinning his wrists to the floor.

“Got you,” George declares gleefully, flushed pink with droplets of water caught between his

lashes.

He looks pretty like this. Uncaring, lifted from the harrowing responsibilities of a robotics captain. He looks less like a future suit, dedicating his entire life to serving the needs of machinery, and more like a boy. George has always been versatile like that though, that's not a new idea. He looks like he could fit into any picture he wanted to.

His mind wanders back to what Sapnap said to him a few days ago. They're both still laughing, George's grip loosening, and Dream's heart skips a beat when he looks up at him.

Oh.

Oh.

Chapter End Notes

HI SORRY FOR VANISHING FOR TWO WEEKS AFTER PROMISING FASTER UPDATES. FEEL FREE TO LEAVE HATE COMMENTS

jokes aside thank you for your patience! life got busier than anticipated.

first and foremost, holy fucking shit 1092 kudos thank you all so much

the next update may also take a few more days than i think because i've noticed the formatting on some of the earlier chapters has been messed up so i gotta go back and fix all of that, but i have more time during the day now so maybe not. what i'm trying to say is who knows? i don't. just wanted to explicitly state if anyone had any concerns: no smut for this fic :)

also there is a tentative chapter count but i will most likely end up increasing it
thank you so much for reading, love seeing your thoughts as always whether that be on here or on twitter or curiouscat and see you all (hopefully very) soon :)

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

This was all Sapnap's fault.

If he hadn't planted that idea in Dream's head, none of this would have ever happened. By this, Dream means the completely irrational and poorly timed infatuation he's developed for his roommate. They were going to graduate soon. This was the worst idea Dream had ever had in his life. The worst idea *Sapnap* had ever had in Dream's life.

Speak of the devil. The door of their room opens up and George walks in.

There had to have been something in George's water, or something in the lighting, or some sort of divine fuck-up. This was some sick joke his brain was playing on him in some sort of premature descent to madness, revenge for sitting still for so long while studying for midterms.

"You alright?" George asks him, frowning as he reaches out to check Dream's temperature with the back of his palm. "You're not coming down with the flu, are you?"

"No mom," Dream mutters halfheartedly. "How was Nikolai?"

"Good," George says. "He's super busy with all the paperwork for university, barely get to see him anymore. It was nice."

Dream hums out a noise of acknowledgment, trying to dissolve the nerves in his stomach by breathing in and out steadily.

"What're you thinking about the spring break trip?" George asks nonchalantly as he sits down on Dream's bed.

They always hang out on Dream's bed now, George likes it better because it's by the window and the light filters in nicely during the sunnier days.

"We still have a few months to figure it out," Dream says. "*Winter* break has barely started."

"Yeah," George says, pulling his sleeves over his hands and shivering. "It's so cold out today."

This is supposed to be the part where Dream shows some self restraint and does something normal, like suggesting George get a jacket. A more level-minded version of him might even go and retrieve one for him.

Instead, he rolls off the bed, tells George to stay put, and pulls the suitcase out from under his bed. He tosses aside a few sweaters packed on the surface before finding what he wanted.

He tosses his letterman at George. "Here."

George gapes at him, holding the jacket up the sleeves.

"This is your letterman."

Dream loves his letterman.

"It's warm," Dream defends.

"I couldn't," George says, holding it out to him to take back, but he stops at the dejected look on Dream's face.

"It's warm, trust me," Dream repeats. "If you want. But if you don't, it's totally cool."

George stands from the bed and for a second Dream thinks he's going to hand it back. Instead, George makes his way to the full length mirror attached to the back of their door and puts it on.

"It's big on me," George says, twisting around to look at it from every angle.

It is. The royal purple fabric swallows George up, and the sleeves are far too big. Dream's heart clenches when George runs a finger across the golden lettering just below the shoulder that reads his name.

Fuck. Fuck you, Sapnap.

"It's just us for the next two weeks, everyone else is going home," George notes. "Is there anything you wanna do?"

"We could go skating again," Dream suggests, laughing when George's face scrunches into an expression of displeasure.

"You just want an excuse to hold my hand," George says back, and Dream is a little offended because it's only partially true.

Fuck.

"Good one," Dream says, walking forward to wrap his arms around George's shoulders, resting his chin on his head.

He stares at the both of them in the mirror. George presses his lips together and rolls his eyes like he's irritated, but he's smiling.

"Do you think people would freak out if they saw me in this?" George asks.

Yeah. Absolutely. I'm seeing it and I'm freaking out, and I'm the one who instigated it.

"Bit of a conceited thing to say," Dream teases.

George's eyes widen and he shakes his head. "I meant because it's *your* jacket, idiot."

Dream curses the fact that football season ended before he became friends with George, because the idea of him wearing Dream's jersey during a game is consuming a concerning amount of space inside of his brain.

Sapnap, you bastard.

"If you really want a reaction, we should make out in the middle of campus," Dream says.

What the fuck is he even saying?

"At least take me to dinner first," George says, buttoning up the jacket.

"I literally did," Dream says, rolling his eyes. "If you want to go out with me again so badly, all

you have to do is ask.”

He’s blurring all the lines with this one. He waits for George to quip back, to go even further or to tell him off. Instead, George goes red and mutters something under his breath.

“Everyone’s leaving tomorrow,” Dream says awkwardly.

He pushed too far.

“Yeah,” George says, going to grab his laptop from his bed before making his way back to Dream’s. “Wanna watch something?”

Dream lets out a sigh of relief in his mind as he sits back down next to George, a respectful distance away. He watches as George scrolls through the YouTube trending page, before settling on a Crash Course video.

“You’re joking,” Dream says. “We’re not studying right now, George.”

“It’s interesting!” George defends, shifting closer so that their knees knock together, but he clicks off the video.

“Why’d you click off?”

George groans. “You said no.”

“You never listen to me,” Dream says back.

George thinks about this for a moment. “That’s true.”

So Dream ends up watching three videos about Critical Media Consumption. Two of them on his own, because George passed out on his shoulder after the first one and he doesn’t dare move.



George’s eyes flicker open, adjusting to the light.

“Good morning,” he hears a voice say from above him.

He closes his eyes again, giving up on the prospect of moving. It’s winter break. There’s nowhere to be.

He shifts his head down from where it’s currently resting, and moves it to on top of Dream’s chest.

“Tired?” Dream murmurs, tentatively carding a hand through George’s hair.

George makes a noise of acknowledgement, and presses his cheek to the fabric of Dream’s shirt. This can’t be good. Dream hopes that George has bad hearing, because his heart has given up on the idea of behaving and is currently beating at a concerning fast rate.

“You’re always falling asleep everywhere,” Dream says out loud.

“Sh,” George says, bringing his entire hand over Dream’s mouth. “Go to bed.”

“You made me sit through lectures while classes were out,” Dream complains, but he shifts so that he’s lying down, George still propped on his chest. “This okay?”

“You needed it,” George mumbles into his shirt. “Because you’re a dumbass.”

Dream laughs shortly, using one arm to keep George in place and the other to close the laptop and tuck it safely underneath his bed frame.

“I used to work,” George says. “That’s where I used to disappear at the beginning of the term.”

“Oh,” Dream says. “You tutor less people now though, right?”

“No, I used to work at Billiard’s,” George clarifies. “But then I quit.”

Dream is confused.

“Oh, okay. You could’ve told me that at the beginning of the year. Not that you’re obligated to, but like, y’know.”

“I thought you’d make fun of me,” George says, voice containing a soft rasp.

“Why would I make fun of you?” Dream asks. “Was there a stupid uniform you had to wear? If you show me I won’t laugh, I promise.”

“No, no stupid uniform,” George mutters. “Was being kind of dramatic, looking back on it.”

“What’s stupid?”

“I’m here on a scholarship,” George says.

“Well that’s not news,” Dream responds with a frown. “You’re smart.”

“No, Dream, like a full-ride. For robotics and shit,” George continues. “It’s academic, but it’s also needs based.”

“Okay, why would I make fun of you for a needs based scholarship?”

“I don’t know,” George finally says. “I’m like- my family couldn’t afford Pine Hill. We’ve been in a bit of a tough financial spot for the past few years, and y’know.”

Dream feels a wave of guilt and sadness wash over him. “Is that why you wouldn’t tell me? You thought I’d be mean to you about that?”

“It’s stupid,” George repeats, clearly avoiding the question.

“It’s not,” Dream corrects him. “It’s like- I get it- not like, get it as in what you had to deal with, but like, I get why you wouldn’t want to tell people. But I wouldn’t have told anyone if you seriously told me not to.”

Dream had seen it. It’s not the majority of people, but there’s a handful of individuals who are waiting for the first sign of weakness from anyone, just so that they can pounce on them. That’s just the world, he supposes, but it doesn’t mean it doesn’t suck.

“I know,” George sighs. “I was just being paranoid, cause yeah.”

“I’m glad you’re comfortable with telling me,” Dream offers. “It means we’ve developed trust.”

It's silent for a bit, but it's comfortable. He feels like he should say something else.

Maybe sorry, for constantly taking jabs at George for having no personality outside of his schoolwork.

"Told you the trust exercise was worth something," Dream says instead.

George laughs.

"I really wanted to come here," George admits. "I saw Pine Hill in a brochure in primary school, and I became obsessed."

"Yeah?" Dream asks.

"My school had no robotics anything, so I started taking things apart and building in my own time. I saw the promotional video on the Pine Hill Robotics YouTube page, and I was like, yeah, I'm gonna do that. I didn't even notice it was in America until it was time to apply."

Dream can't help but laugh at that. There is something so endearing about this version of George; stumbling over himself to take a better look at something he likes. Passionate instead of disciplined.

"My parents were like, no way, but I was making a million phone calls, and I figured out how to do freshman year, but I came in with no plan for the rest of it. But the robotics stuff worked out, and I got the scholarship, and yeah. I'm still here."

"That's brave," Dream tells him. "You just saw something you wanted and went for it. That's so cool, George."

George goes red and pulls the collar of Dream's letterman over his face.

"You're cute like this," Dream says before he can stop himself. "It's a nice change from the dictator style behaviour."

"I don't have dictator style behaviour," George grumbles. "Some of you just can't follow simple instructions."

"Whatever you say Napoleon, now go back to bed," Dream snorts.

George tenses for a moment. "I forgot to ask, is this okay?"

"Is what okay?"

George sits up. "If it's uncomfortable I can get off."

That is probably the last thing Dream wants right now.

"No, it's comfortable," Dream assures him, and George tentatively lies back down on top of him.

"I get homesick a lot," George admits.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

George's hair tickles his neck. He doesn't dare move.

“Tell me something too,” George says. “A secret.”

Dream thinks. There’s definitely no shortage of things to say, but they all feel too heavy for right now.

“I don’t know if I want to play football next year,” he says, and he immediately feels stupid.

He half expects George to laugh, but he instead waits for Dream to elaborate.

“I’ve been playing for a really long time,” Dream says. “I like it, but I don’t know if I want to do it professionally. My parents really want me to.”

George reaches his arm over Dream’s head and knocks his elbow into his nose.

“Ouch, what the hell?”

“Sorry,” George whispers. “Was trying to get to your hair.”

“Why?”

“You’re playing with mine, I wanna play with yours,” George defends.

He’s got him there. Dream has absentmindedly made a mess of George’s hair. It’s longer than it was at the beginning of the year. George props himself up on Dream’s collarbones, and they’re nearly cheek to cheek.

Dream wants to scream. This has got to be some sort of sick joke. George has never been this physically forward with him, or anyone, ever. It’s always been Dream initiating between the two of them.

And by physically forward he means completely platonically, and by initiating he means in a friendly way. Because this new development is independent of his own thoughts and actions, and has been brought on by peer pressure. And by new development he means the stupid crush he has on George.

“Your jacket smells like you,” George says.

Fuck right off.

“You feeling okay?” Dream asks. “Feel like you’re the one coming down with something.”

He brings the back of his hand to George’s forehead which is surprisingly warm.

“George, you definitely have a fever.”

“No I don’t,” George says. “I’m fine.”

“No you’re not,” Dream says back. “You’re acting delirious.”

“Name one delirious thing I’ve done,” George says stubbornly.

“You’re literally in my bed!” Dream exclaims.

George goes quiet.

“I can leave if you want.”

That's definitely not what Dream wants.

"No, I want you to stay," Dream says.

Another moment of silence.

"I might get you sick too," George mumbles. "I should probably get up, actually."

He moves upwards slowly, and Dream gently pulls him back.

"I'm just teasing, I don't want you to get up."

"No, I know, I'm not upset, I just don't wanna get you sick."

"It's fine," Dream rushes out to say.

It's definitely not fine. He doesn't want to spend winter break sick, but he also doesn't want George to get up.

"It's probably not even contagious."

"Alright," George resigns, settling back into Dream's chest.

Dream tentatively wraps his arms around him. George doesn't protest.

"Dream?"

"Yeah?"

"Your jacket smells like ass."

"You're still wearing it," Dream snorts.

George doesn't have anything smart to say to that.

"Go to sleep, George."

George doesn't respond, and Dream thanks every force of the universe. Maybe sleeping in the same bed is not the best way to discourage the way he feels, but what's a couple of hours in the grand scheme of things?

It's not like it means anything. It doesn't even mean he likes George. He could just really enjoy his company. That happens to people sometimes, when they can't discern between romantic and platonic feelings. Dream is just happy to be on positive terms with George. None of this means anything.

And George seems pretty out of it too. This is all just a stupid mistake of a realization. He'll be over it before he can blink.

Fuck you, Sapnap.

it has come to my attention 25 chapters is not enough. i was thinking about just making the chapter lengths longer but i don't wanna do that so chapter count subject to increase lol i just don't wanna drag it out unnecessarily because that is the WORST it's like being held hostage digitally.

hope you're all doing well today, thank you for all the love on the last chapter :) i really appreciate that so many of you take the time to comment - i know i kind of sound like a broken record with that but i just can't comprehend the numbers sometimes. take care, would love to know your thoughts, and see you in the next chapter!

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It hasn't gone away.

Dream has tried everything aside from distance - searching for things he hates about him, trying to catch George at a time where the sun doesn't readjust its position in the fucking sky to make him look gorgeous. It turns out to be much more difficult of a task than originally anticipated.

The worst part about liking George is that he used to hate him. He already knows all the things that make George unlikable, but all of those things have somehow become endearing. He also already knows all of George's larger despicable living habits, but he's caught feelings anyways, so those don't do very much to deter him. All he's done is discover new things about George through increased attention paid on his behalf, in a non-creepy way, he swears.

Not to mention the fact George has somehow claimed ownership of his letterman, and Dream is a weak, weak, man because there is no way in hell he's asking for it back. Not when George looks like that in it.

It's not fair. He's always known George was good looking, sure, but being close to him all the time was giving him a headache. His George Trivia knowledge bank grows larger and larger by day.

Before this, all he knew was that George prefers to wake up earlier, but now he knows that George likes breakfast, and he likes eating it in the cafeteria. George likes the way the birds sound in the morning. George will only kick the same stone twice on one walking trip, and he'll look around for it on the way back to the dorm.

George pulls his scarf over his ears instead of wearing a hat, and George thinks that financial illiteracy is the worst thing that's happened to America.

Dream is more physically affectionate than George is, that's a given. He's like that with everyone. Naturally, with his budding feelings that he needs to burn at the root as soon as the opportunity provides itself, he tries his best to put distance between the two of them. Apparently, George is a fucking cat, because the second Dream turns away from him when he wants attention, George will crawl onto his bed, or creep up behind him at his desk, and breathe down his neck until Dream spends time with him.

This would all be great, if it wasn't the worst. George is the worst person to have a crush on. If he could rate this experience on Yelp, he'd give it two stars, because one would be mean.

He decides that distance is his best bet, but once again, George swoops in and doesn't let him have it. Anytime he makes plans to do anything alone, all George has to do is ask if he can come, and Dream crumbles and rewires his whole evening for him. It's bad.

Dream has always been bad at setting boundaries with people he likes. He hops out of bed and into the shower and hopes that what he feels will be gone when he's clean.

When he returns to the bedroom, and George is yawning as he stretches out his arms, the hope dies. He's stuck with this for now.

"Good morning," George says, blinking as he looks at Dream with a smile. "You've been up

earlier than me nearly every day so far.”

Uh, yeah.

“Good morning,” Dream says back. “Merry Christmas Eve. Just been sleeping well, I guess.”

George nods absentmindedly, eyes wandering to Dream’s window.

“If you like the window so much, why didn’t you take the bed by it?” Dream asks, as his legs involuntarily move towards George.

Don’t sit on his bed, don’t sit on his bed, don’t sit on his-

Dream sits on the side of George’s bed. George leans back, head hitting the wall with a soft thud.

“Window beds are always colder in the winter,” George says.

“It’s nice cold,” Dream insists.

“Sounds like something someone who got stuck with the window bed says to cope.”

Dream scoffs, and then sees the proud glint in George’s eyes, and laughs. His stomach does a flip.

See. This is what he means. It’s a bad idea. There was nothing- George didn’t even do anything! And he’s freaking out.

“What d’you wanna do today?” George asks Dream as he climbs out of bed.

“Together?” Dream asks stupidly.

Of course together. They’ve been doing everything together. There’s next to nobody other than them left on campus.

“We could go somewhere,” George says. “Grab a bus.”

“In this weather?”

“Don’t be a *pussy*, Dream,” George says, grinning.

“What did you just call me?” Dream asks, standing up and taking a step towards George.

George rolls his eyes. “I called you a pussy.”

Dream takes another step towards him, and George takes a step back. He takes another one, and another one, until George is crowded back against the door of the bathroom.

They’re standing dangerously close, before George turns his head to the side.

“I have to, uh, brush my teeth,” George mutters sheepishly.

Dream gets a grip. “Oh yeah, uh, sure. I’ll look at stuff to do until you get back.”

George nods, smiling again before he steps into the bathroom.

Fucking Christ, what the hell was that? Dream curses himself. He’s got to stop.

He should consider taking a few days to live in Sapnap’s room, or something. To give George

some space. To give himself some space.

He has to call Sapnap and give him a piece of his mind for essentially socially conditioning him to have a crush on George. An illogical, dumb, stupid, dumb, stupid, dumb crush on George.

He distracts himself by looking at possible things to do - they could drive down to a mountain, but he doubts there's too much to do there, other than talk. He absentmindedly looks for tacky tourist stops on the way; there's a gum museum, which looks like the worst thing to happen to modern society.

George emerges in a gray sweater and jeans and damp hair, and *Dream's* fucking letterman.

"Oh, do you want this back now, by the way? Sorry, I've just kind of stolen it," George says, going to take it off.

"No, no, it's all good," Dream insists, even though it's probably going to be cited as the reason for his death. "I have another one too, it's not like it's one of a kind."

"Still," George says. "It's yours. I've kind of stolen it."

"Yeah," Dream says absentmindedly. "It's the inner hyena in you. Check this out; it's a few hours away, but we can stay overnight at a motel or something."

He turns the laptop screen towards George to show him a picture of a mountain. George looks at Dream hesitantly. "What would we even do there?"

"Winter sports," Dream says.

"No more skating," George firmly states.

Dream pouts. "You don't wanna hold my hand?"

What the fuck is he doing? He's setting himself up at this point, but he still can't stop. George rolls his eyes.

"Fine. Let's go. What's the place called?"

Dream grins. "That's a secret."

George looks wary. "Dream..."

"It'll be fun, I promise. Sapnap gave me the keys to his car, we won't even have to take the bus. Just pack a change of clothes and a towel," Dream insists. "You gotta trust me, it's going to be so much fun. There's a gum museum on the way there, we can even stop by."

"Well how could I say no to that?" George asks sarcastically, but he turns to the wardrobe and pulls out a couple things to bring with them.

Dream tosses a few things into his backpack as well. So much for his plan of avoiding George. He figures that would be mean though. They've only been friends for a little bit and he doesn't want to make George feel like he got bored of him.

They climb into Sapnap's car and toss their bags into the backseat.

"Are you sure Sapnap is okay with this?" George asks.

“For sure,” Dream says. “I already asked and confirmed, don’t worry. We won’t get arrested for grand theft auto.”

George huffs as Dream turns the phone screen away from him as he puts in the address.

“I just want to know where we’re going.”

“It’s a mountain, there’s just a pit stop we have to take before we get there,” Dream promises.

“Then we’ll go down to the motel and sleep in. Spend Christmas in town, maybe, if you don’t have any other plans.”

“I just have to call my family,” George says. “But otherwise no. Is there something weird at the gum factory?”

“Gum *museum*,” Dream corrects as he starts the car. “Get it right, George.”

Dream hands George the AUX, and starts to drive. They get on the highway, and George falls asleep for a little. Dream turns the music down, and watches him for a moment, before forcing himself to turn back towards the road.

When George awakens he looks around and frowns. “This place looks familiar.”

“Does it?” Dream asks. “How much of California have you seen?”

George grins. “California mountain - you’re taking me to Mount Shasta.”

“No,” Dream says, “but good guess. It’s nearby.”

“I went there with Karl, Sapnap, and Quackity a while back, when you were pissing me off,” George says. “It’s pretty.”

“Do you wanna stop by?” Dream asks.

George shakes his head no. “Another time.”

What if there never is another time? After we graduate?

Dream shakes it off. He doesn’t want to think about it, so he pushes it to the back of his mind.

“Do you want to stop by?” George asks him after a moment.

“Maybe,” Dream says, but it’s definitely a yes.

They do a drive through lunch at McDonald’s, and George insists on driving the rest of the way.

“You get too aggressive when changing lanes,” George informs him. “It’s weird.”

“I don’t know if I should trust someone who comes from somewhere they don’t even drive on the right side of the road to get us somewhere he doesn’t even know,” Dream says back.

Regardless, he gets in the passenger seat.

“This is the most exciting year I’ve ever had,” George admits. “Like, I had fun for the first three years, but I’m so glad I met you, and Karl and Sapnap finally got together, and that Quackity planned on using me for notes but ended up actually liking me.”

Dream laughs.

"It's been good," he says. "Just hard, picking where I wanna go."

"Where'd you apply?" George asks.

"Some schools in the south, a few UCs. My parents want me in Florida because it's close, but as long as I'm playing football they're happy," Dream laughs. "You?"

"The UCs, Columbia, Boston," George lists. "I applied for a school or two in the UK as well, but they're reaches."

"You could probably get in anywhere," Dream insists.

"I dunno," George says, turning red. "But thank you, I appreciate it."

At the next pitstop, Dream takes the wheel again, and he's buzzing with excitement.

"Wait, I forgot to ask, where's the gum museum?" George asks.

Dream exhales in disappointment.

"It's closed today, but they're open the day after Christmas - if you're okay with staying an extra night, we can hit it on the way back."

"I don't see why not," George says.

"We're almost there," Dream excitedly states as he pulls the car into a parking lot. "Okay, close your eyes."

George obliges.

"No peeking," Dream insists, covering George's eyes with his hands. "Is this alright?"

George nods.

What the hell is he doing? This was not part of the plan. Dream doesn't give a fuck. He could get his heart shattered into a million tiny pieces, but he thinks this moment would make it worth it. He leads George to the front of a sign.

"Open your eyes," he says, removing his hands, and George blinks as he adjusts his eyes to the light.

"Welcome to Edgewood, California," George reads out loud.

Dream waits one beat, two beats, another for good measure.

"You can edge *my* wood anytime," Dream says, grinning as he waits for George's reaction.

George stares at him, jaw agape. "You did not."

"I did!"

"Dream, you did not drive us out here to--"

"I did, George."

George stares at him, open mouthed and smiling at the same time. “You bastard.”

“Isn’t it glorious?” Dream asks, and George holds his head in his hands.

“Dream, this *can’t* be the reason we’re here.”

“Well no, we still have ten minutes to drive down. There’s a motel in that town.”

George stares at him again. “There’s something you’re not telling me.”

Dream smiles at him, all teeth. “You are correct.”

“What’s the town called, Dream?”

“The town is called Weed. We’re going to stay in the Weed Motel, and then walk around the Edgewood Trail. That’s how you’re going to spend Christmas, George. With me-”

“Stop.”

“-In California-”

“I hate you.”

“-Edging wood,” Dream finishes.

George rolls his shoulders to adjust Dream’s jacket, slipping his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

Fuck.

“So what’s the itinerary?” George asks as they get back into the car.

“We gotta check in at the motel first, and then Edgewood is ours,” Dream says with a grin.

George looks at him, smiling, in Dream’s letterman, laughing at Dream’s jokes, in Dream’s car. Sappnap’s car, technically, but he doesn’t worry himself with the details. Okay, the aftermath of Christmas here is probably going to follow him around for a concerningly long time. Once he inevitably impulsively admits how he feels, and George goes running in the opposite direction, he’s going to think about this moment and be upset about it.

But right now he indulges and lets himself feel it. He smiles back at George, and he lets George toss french fries at his mouth and misses while he’s driving, and he justifies the distracted driving by telling himself there’s nobody on the road anyways.

“I’ve only gotten us one room,” Dream says. “That’s alright, right?”

“No Dream, we’ve slept in the same room for months now, but Weed, California is where I have to draw the line,” George says sarcastically. “How much do I owe you for the room?”

“Dude, I dragged you out here, I’m not letting you pay me back,” Dream laughs.

George goes quiet and the mood shifts. After a few moments of silence, Dream speaks.

“Hey, everything alright?”

“I hate when people do that,” George says softly. “I can pay for my own shit, I don’t need you to feel bad for me or whatever.”

Dream's heart sinks to his stomach, and he feels the acid bite away at it.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that," he says sincerely. "I just don't- I don't know. I meant it more in a 'I invited you out so I pay' way, not to be demeaning or anything."

George's shoulders untense.

"It's alright, you don't need to be sorry," he says. "I shouldn't have jumped to conclusions."

"Wow, look at us, communicating," Dream says to lighten the mood. "We're like an old married couple that finally got marriage counselling."

God, why'd he say that? Fuck. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. He might as well slam his head against the dashboard. This was a bad idea.

"Kind of," George agrees, and Dream immediately stops planning his move to Alaska.

George carries both of their backpacks into their room. He tosses Dream's onto the bed by the wall, and his own by the bed by the window.

"Thought it gets cold by the window," Dream says, sitting down on the edge of his bed.

"It does," George says, smiling coyly, like he knows what he's doing when he plays with the hem of the sleeve of Dream's letterman. "But it's alright. Your jacket's quite warm."

Dream wants to drive his head through the drywall.

Chapter End Notes

niche southern oregon/northern california attractions. the information you never knew you needed. i invented oregon, actually. maybe this information isn't niche. maybe i'm wrong about all of it, i don't know. also there's no fucking gum museum but they should build one i would love to see it.

also i typed a good 200 words of this with my eyes closed i just wanted to share.

hope you all enjoyed the chapter! the next one is going to most likely be longer, so it might take me a little longer to write and get up. thank you all for the very nice comments, i appreciate them very much <3 hope you're all well, hope you liked the chapter, would love to know your thoughts, and see you in the next one :)

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Dream has had no shortage of bad ideas in his life. It's a consequence of being impulsive. This has got to be the Magnus Opus of bad ideas. There's a boy he has to get over and he's driven the two of them out to the middle of nowhere on Christmas Eve.

George is sitting crossed legged on the bed, still in Dream's jacket, flipping through the coupon book for local attractions that's on the bed. His eyebrows are furrowed in concentration, tongue poking the inside of his cheek. Dream wants to kiss him.

"There's a lumber museum," George comments. "We could do that."

"We're already going to a gum museum later," Dream states. "Let's do something unmuseum-ey. Like a trail."

"It's so cold though," George protests, shivering exaggeratedly for effect.

"Well, you've got my jacket already, I don't know what more I'm supposed to do," Dream sighs.

George groans, tossing the coupon book to the side and laying down on his back, wailing as he stretches.

"Give me your skin," George deadpans.

Dream blinks twice at him.

"You heard me," George says. "Give it to me."

George reaches out and grabs Dream's wrist, taking him by surprise. Dream falls forward, unable to brace himself in time. He ends up knocking his chin to George's forehead.

"Ouch," George yells. "Get off me!"

"You did this!" Dream exclaims indignantly.

He can't even see George, but he knows that he's rolling his eyes like Dream is insane.

"You're such a..." Dream starts, but he doesn't finish as he pulls himself up. "What's gotten into you?"

"I'm bored," George complains. "We gotta do something."

"Being in Weed, California doesn't authorize you to act like you're drugged up," Dream states. "Behave."

"I've never even taken drugs," George responds. "Or drank."

"Me neither," Dream admits and George laughs at him.

"Wow, prude," George says with a grin.

“How am I-” Dream starts, but George cuts him off.

“You’re so easy to rile up, Dream,” George says with a smile. “It’s ridiculously entertaining.”

Dream feels himself go bright red. Thankfully, George won’t be able to tell because he’s a colourblind fool.

“That’s mean,” Dream says, crossing his arms. “You’re mean.”

George ignores him, and reaches for the coupon book again. “So what do we do? Everything is closed. We should’ve come after Christmas, that would’ve been smarter.”

“It would’ve,” Dream agrees. “This would’ve been a *great* perspective to present before we left.”

“You’re the one that dragged us here with no plan,” George argues. “Take some accountability.”

Dream thinks for a moment. He could always veto George’s whining and force them to go to the trail, but he doesn’t think that would be much fun. There’s got to be some sort of local Christmas festivities taking place - that sounds like something they’d both enjoy.

He pulls out his phone and scrolls through the different options. A town skating rink is open, but he’s going to have to pass. There’s drive-by Christmas lighting a few minutes away from them, but the Google Reviews on that are brutal.

“What’re you thinking?” George asks, placing his chin on Dream’s shoulder to get a closer look. “There’s a diner that’s open until midnight a few minutes from here.”

“There’s not much to do other than the trail,” Dream admits. “Unless you wanna go see the mountain you’ve already seen, but then we gotta drive there and drive back. There’s another mountain here too, I think, if you want-”

“Dream,” George says, sitting up straight. “It’s alright, seriously. I’m just happy to be here.”

Dream turns around to look at him and smiles.

“Let’s try your trail,” George grumbles, but it’s half-hearted.

Dream watches him reluctantly put on his shoes and grab his wallet, and then remembers to do the same. They walk out into the chill of the night. They pass by trees and the Lumber Museum, George pointing at it across the street. He listens to George ramble on and on about how his little sister’s been on his ass about teaching her to code, but then refuses to listen to anything he’s saying when he tries.

“She’s so stubborn for no good reason,” George says, kicking at a stone in his way.

Once.

“Yeah, I wonder why. That seems like a complete outlier of a trait for her to have,” Dream states monotonously.

“Right? I’m so flexible with how I lead things, and she’s just an absolute beast,” George continues.

Twice.

“George, you are probably equally, if not more stubborn than your sister,” Dream laughed. “Honestly, I feel worse for her than you.”

“You’re supposed to be on my side,” George says pointedly. “She’s a bit insane. Don’t tell her that the two of us came here alone, tomorrow, by the way. She’ll blow a gasket.”

Dream’s head spins as he processes this information.

“You want me to meet your family?” he asks, already feeling nervous.

It would have been better if George had chosen to withhold this information and pressed it onto him spontaneously.

“Well, yeah,” George says matter of factly. “I’ve already met your parents, and mine have been asking about you, so.”

He had been trying to forget his parents’ interaction with George the moment it had finished. They had been so condescending, the second hand embarrassment had been nearly unbearable.

“What do you think of my parents?” Dream asks, bracing himself for the truth.

“They seem really nice,” George responds instead. “Can’t believe they raised *you*. You sure there wasn’t a mix up of some kind?”

“Ow,” Dream says, knocking his shoulder at George playfully. “That’s mean, stop.”

“*That’s mean, stop*,” George mocks. “Also, I apologize in advance if Tilly says anything weird. She’s convinced herself that we like each other.”

Dream’s heart drops to his feet for a moment before he manages to let out a nervous laugh. “What? Where’d she even get that idea?”

“She thinks I talk about you cause I like you,” George groans. “She also finds your dumbassery endearing.”

He talks about me.

“You talk about me?” Dream asks, watching as George begins to get flustered.

“Not like- listen, you used to piss me off a lot and I didn’t want to talk Karl’s ear off, so I’d vent to her sometimes.”

“You talk about me,” Dream says again gleefully, wrapping an arm around George’s shoulder.

“You got a crush, George?”

“Fuck off,” George hisses. “We’re in public. I talk shit about you.”

“You like me,” Dream insists.

“Yeah,” George whispers in his ear, and Dream jolts backwards, trying his best to find his center of gravity.

George laughs. “Still dishing it out but can’t take it.”

They’ve arrived at the trail and Dream is pleasantly surprised. Fairy lights have been strung up by the sign on the entrance, and there are more displays than there were in the photos online.

“It isn’t bad,” Dream starts.

“No,” George breathes out. “It’s quite nice actually.”

George pulls Dream towards a wire structure with blinking lights of a snowman on a sleigh with the cuff of his sleeve.

“He has your nose,” George says, reaching out and booping Dream’s nose with his index finger.

Dream looks down at him and tries to look upset, but cracks up at the proud expression on George’s face. *God fucking damn.*

“Let me take your picture,” George says, pulling out his phone and stepping backwards.

“No, don’t worry,” Dream insists, but George motions for him to stay put as he leans back to get a better angle.

Dream shoves his hands into his pockets, smiling awkwardly. He doesn’t fare too well in front of cameras, if he’s being honest. The idea of George in particular having this picture makes him feel nervous.

“You look like you’re being held at gunpoint,” George calls out with a laugh.

Dream looks directly into the lens and mouths the words ‘help me.’

George laughs and Dream grins in response before the light on George’s phone flickers. He runs back to Dream and shows him the shot.

“Thanks,” Dream tells him. “What’re you gonna do with it?”

“Put it on my Facebook, obviously,” George scoffs, before shoving the phone into his pocket. “I think I might get all of the pictures from this year printed out physically, actually. To put on my wall in college.”

“Aw,” Dream says. “You’re gonna frame my picture? So you can stare at it while you sleep?”

“You wish,” George laughs, unbuttoning the top two buttons on the letterman.

It’s way too big on him.

“I used to build these with my sister all the time,” George tells him. “Not this big, but y’know. When she was younger her friends would come over. I’d make Dora out of the wire and string the lights around it and they’d go wild.”

“That’s so cool,” Dream tells him. “There’s so many other things you’re good at that you could’ve shown them, but you chose to be creative. That’s really cool.”

George blushes. “Like what?”

“Being a clown,” Dream says with a grin, dodging out of the way as George goes to hit his arm.

“Not funny, didn’t laugh,” George states, already walking away from Dream and towards the Christmas tree.

Dream jogs behind him. They stand by a black metal arc and stare up in silence. The night feels peaceful; quiet chattering, the occasional loud laugh. Dream looks to George, who glows underneath the red and blue and green of the lights of the tree. He leans forward for a moment, before stopping himself.

"I like the way they did the lights," George whispers. "It's pretty."

You're pretty.

He chooses to not say it. He doesn't want to ruin Christmas Eve. He pulls out his phone and takes three pictures. George moves in the middle of the second one and laughs.

"What're you doing?"

"Frying a chicken," Dream says sarcastically. "I'm taking your picture, idiot."

George rolls his eyes. "Why?"

Because you're pretty.

"It's just- you look good," Dream defends. "I thought you'd want me to have your picture framed to look at when I sleep in college too."

George scoffs, but leans in closer to him, resting his head on the side of Dream's shoulder. "It's cold."

"Yeah," Dream says dumbly.

A light buzzes on the top of the arch and both of them jolt up in surprise. George looks up and laughs, little puffs of white air escaping from his mouth. Dream tightens his hands into fists in his jacket pockets. The ends of his fingers are freezing.

"Light-up mistletoe," George says, gesturing above them. "Clever."

A few people around them have stopped to watch and see what they'll do.

Pervs.

"Bastards," Dream states. "Lured us in with the tree before they trapped us to kiss for them. Lovely."

He feels nervous as the crowd begins to grow a little bigger.

"Let's give them a show," George says, and Dream's heart almost jumps out of his chest and into his mouth. *Gross.*

George places his left hand on Dream's right cheek, thumb brushing against the corner of his mouth. Dream exhales embarrassingly loudly and he's sure George felt it. *What the fuck is happening?* George leans in, tilting his head so that the crowd can't see their faces and shifts his thumb to cover Dream's lips. Then he presses his lips to his own thumb. Dream is a horrible person for it, but he finds himself wishing George's thumb slipped.

A few scattered claps can be heard from the crowd. Dream feels his face burn as George pulls away.

"Congratulations," a man wearing a reflective vest with a name badge announces to the two of them monotonously. "In honour of the Christmas spirit, both of you have won a romantic dinner for two at The Wallflower."

He hands Dream a voucher, which he takes.

“Thanks,” George breathes, and as the man walks away he giggles, pressing his forehead to Dream’s arm. “Oh my God, no fucking way!”

“I think if you- paying two people to kiss has got to be some form of prostitution,” Dream stutters out dumbly. “We- we could’ve both been- we’re both minors! There’s no-”

“Keep your voice down,” George says with a grin. “Who would we be to turn down a *romantic* dinner for two?”

Dream stares at him wide mouthed. No way this is the same guy he shared a room with at the beginning of the year.

“Are you sick?” Dream asks, pressing his cold fingers to George’s forehead.

George squeaks like a mouse and tries to jump away, but Dream grabs his arm and forces him to stay in place. “No! Get your hands off, get them *off!* ”

“George!” Dream exclaims, unable to hold himself back from fondly smiling at him. “What has gotten into you?”

“I’m just having fun,” George defends with a coy smile. “You do it all the time.” He stops smiling for a moment. “I didn’t overstep or anything, did I? Because-”

“You’re fine,” Dream cuts him off. “I promise.”

The *kiss me for real, dumbass* , is left unsaid.

They linger around the other two larger structures for a while before deciding to make their way to The Wallflower for dinner. George looks up the location on his phone, and Dream sneaks another picture of him when George is focusing on trying to zoom in on something.

“It’s a four minute walk,” George says. “Back in the direction of the motel.”

“Alright,” Dream responds, rubbing his hands together for warmth. “Lead the way.”

“Are you cold?” George asks, going to take off the letterman. “This is really warm, the pockets are like, lined with something really soft. We can switch.”

“Nah,” Dream says. “It’s all good, I promise.”

George looks at him suspiciously before holding onto Dream’s hand. It’s criminally warm.

“If you wanted to hold my hand, you could’ve just asked,” Dream teases.

George tugs him forward and the two of them begin to walk. Dream would freeze out here forever if it meant George would keep holding his hand, which is probably a disgusting thing to say.

“I wanna hold your hand,” George simply says as they continue to walk, and Dream is once again at a loss for words.

They arrive at the diner and George presses the voucher into the hand of the waitress, who hands them a menu and leaves the two of them to decide.

“Our second date,” George says absentmindedly. “Remember that time at that fine dining place?”

“Oh my God,” Dream laughs. “I thought I was gonna have to rescue you from like, these evil

goons. And the food was shit. I'd never been there before in my life, and the thing they gave me shouldn't have even qualified as edible."

George laughs and looks down at the menu, before laughing even harder.

"Listen-" Dream starts, but George waves for him to be quiet and continues to choke on his own breath, in hysterics.

"You are something special, Dream," he says when he calms down, wiping the tears from his eyes and resting the hand that wasn't holding up the menu on the table.

Dream takes George's hand and watches for a reaction. George flushes red, but doesn't move away.

"I'm really happy you're here with me," Dream says honestly. "This is probably one of my favourite Christmas Eves of all time."

George smiles at him while rolling his eyes. He moves his thumb over Dream's hand and traces the side of it.

Kiss him. Lean in and kiss him for real.

"I'm happy I'm here with you too," George says, gripping his hand a little tighter.

Dream glances outside the window and watches as a car drives past the diner at an alarmingly high speed. He's going to tell him.

He glances at George, who's squinting at the milkshake flavours. *This motherfucker needs to wear his glasses.*

He will tell him. He swears. Just not now.

Chapter End Notes

hi hi hope you all liked the chapter and that you're all doing well :) as always comments are super appreciated, thank you for reading and see you in the next one!!

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It turns out Weed, California offers several opportunities for a confession of the soul, or whatever the fuck it was called, especially on Christmas. Dream almost wishes it didn't.

He's woken up by George pouncing on him at seven in the morning, shouting about Christmas. Dream nearly grabs him by the forearms and tosses him to the floor.

"We're on vacation," he groans, but George pulls him into a sitting position. "George, come on, go back to bed."

He wraps an arm around his shoulders and tries to pull him down with him, but George remains strong in his resolve.

"Stop trying to make me get in bed with you," George says smartly in an attempt to fluster him.

Dream wraps his other arm over George's mouth to muffle his yelling and pulls him down next to him. "Shut up. Go back to bed."

He doesn't register that they're spooning until he finds himself digging his chin into the top of George's head. His hair smells like soap.

"Your hair smells like soap," Dream mutters, loosening his grip.

He feels teeth sink into the crook of his elbow in response.

"That's what happens when you bathe regularly," George says back, but he makes no further attempts to escape.

"Taking you away from Pine Hill has turned you into some— some sort of creature with rabies," Dream tells him before clearing his throat. "You've become unhinged."

George turns around so that they're facing each other. Dream closes his eyes.

This is it. He should say it.

George. It turns out being obsessed with hating you for years, then actually getting to know you has fucked with the chemicals in my brain. It doesn't help that you're nice to look at.

"Merry Christmas," George says with a smile. "Thanks for bringing me out here."

"Merry Christmas," Dream repeats. "Back to sleep, now."

He tries to pull the covers over both of their heads but George stops him.

"I'm gonna call my parents," George says. "If you want to be there- like, no pressure. But if you want to, you're welcome to sit with me. But if you don't want to, you don't have to. It's just a few minutes, but no pressure."

"George," Dream pronounced. "I would love to meet your parents."

George blinks, the left corner of his mouth curling upwards. “Okay. Get ready in thirty minutes. I’ll grab us something for breakfast.”

George rolls away from Dream and gets off the bed. Dream listens to his footsteps, and then the opening of the door, and then the sound of it closing.

He groans as he turns, burying his face in the pillow. What the hell was that? *I would love to meet your parents.* It wasn’t that serious. Fuck.

Now George will think he’s obsessed with him in a weird way. He’s not obsessed with George. He *was* obsessed with hating George, but the excitement of hatred drove that further along than the idea of George itself. That’s not his fault.

He manages to pull it together and head into the bathroom before he implodes. He would be doing himself a huge favour by not overthinking this. It’s normal to meet your friends’ parents. He’s met Sapnap’s and Quackity’s and Ross’ a million times.

He runs his toothbrush under the water of the tap before pressing an appropriate amount of Colgate onto it.

Why does this feel exponentially worse? It’s not like he’s proposed to George and he’s asking for their approval. He doesn’t even need them to like him.

He wants them to. If it tips the scales in his favour. He’s not quite sure what the desirable outcome of this situation exactly is.

George returns after he comes out of the shower, holding a stack of toast in one hand and a waffle overflowing with syrup in the other.

Dream coughs when he first takes a bite. “What is that?”

“Syrup,” George informs him as he butters a slice of bread.

“This isn’t maple syrup,” Dream insists. “It’s too sticky.”

“It’s table syrup. Why would they serve maple syrup here?” George asks him amusedly.

Dream groans. “This is the worst day ever.”

“I’m sure you’ll live,” George says sarcastically.

They eat in comfortable silence aside from the muffled yelling coming behind the wall. The people in the room next to them seem to be involved in an argument.

“The sound of Christmas,” Dream sighs. “Feels like home.”

George chokes on the toast he’s eating and slams a hand down on his chest as he coughs.

“You think I’m funny,” Dream grins as he says it.

“On occasion,” George admits. “Don’t let it get to your head.”

He doesn’t complain about the table syrup again. It climbs up the length of his fork and gets his fingers sticky, and it doesn’t taste any better even when he’s halfway through.

“They’ll call in a little,” George says as he plugs his charger into the port by the table.

Dream nods. The butterflies in his stomach get angrier. When George's ringtone goes off, he jumps in his seat.

"Why do you have elevator music as your ringtone?" Dream whispers.

George shushes him as he presses accept call and puts the both of them on speaker.

"Hello?" George says, leaning closer to the receiver.

A child's voice yells back. "Turn on your camera."

George sighs, looking over at Dream apologetically before he obliges. The screen flickers and a girl appears.

"George!" She yells. "And..."

Dream smiles and waves sheepishly. "Hello, I'm Dream. You must be Tilly?"

She nods. "He never shuts up about you. It's so annoying. Whenever he's home, it's all--"

"Okay Tilly, stop lying, thank you," George cuts her off.

Dream is delighted to see that the tips of his ears have turned red.

George's mom drops by a little later and fussed over the two of them for driving so far from the school. His little brother asks when George will come home.

"Tilly," Dream calls out a little later. "George was telling me about you yesterday."

"Yeah? What did he say?" Tilly asks, folding her hands on the table.

"He kept saying that you're impossible to teach," Dream says, looking over to George for a reaction.

George shrugs.

"Are you trying to drive a wedge between me and my brother, Dream?" Tilly asks with a frown.

Dream freezes on the spot. He feels George's eyes burning holes into his side.

"Are you Dream?" George asks, placing a hand delicately on his shoulder.

"No! I just— I didn't—" Dream sputters, looking to George for support.

Tilly breaks into a smile. "Only pulling your leg!"

Dream breathes a sigh of relief.

He excuses himself to the bathroom for George to say his goodbyes. He can hear George yelling from behind the closed door and can't help but bite back a smile.



They spend the majority of Christmas just driving around, looking for things to do. Dream feels nervous because he hasn't exactly planned anything.

"We could go up to the mountain," Dream tries.

"Wherever you feel like going," George responds.

It isn't like they have a line up of options. They drive all the way back around to Mount Shasta to discover that the area George says they were in the last time has been closed off. It's beginning to get discouraging.

"Dream," George tells him, breaking him out of his thoughts. "Stop overthinking."

"I thought we'd be able to do something fun here," Dream says. "I'm sorry. There isn't very much to do."

George looks at him for a moment. "Do you want to see the mountain?"

"Well, if you want to, but if you've already seen it—"

"I asked if *you* wanted to see it," George repeated.

Dream nods, unsure of where this is going. George hesitates for a moment, then glances to the left and the right. He takes Dream's hand.

"I don't— George—"

"There's no cameras," George starts. "And the gate is low. We could jump it."

Dream stares at him slack-jawed. Who is this?

"We could just unlock it too, but that seems riskier. The whole right side of the mountain has a trail running through it, so if we get caught, worse case scenario, we wandered through there and wanted to get out."

"George, we are not trespassing!" Dream tells him. "We aren't even— why are you so ready for this?"

"Why were *you* so ready to fight the mafia?"

Dream groans and throws his head back. "Can you let that go? It doesn't even have to do with anything!"

"I looked up whether the mountain was open for viewing while we were driving down here," George tells him. "And I knew it was closed."

Dream cannot believe this. "Why didn't you tell us to turn around?"

"Because I knew you wanted to see it!" George yells, tugging him forward. "You're such an asshole, Dream. Just say what you mean."

What he means is *I don't want you to feel like you wasted your time coming here with me* but he's sure that if he apologizes one more time George will attack him.

"George," Dream tries, pulling him back. "Let's drive around and find that little opening and go from there. Let's do this lawfully."

“We’re jumping a fence, not orchestrating a heist,” George scoffs, rolling his eyes and pulling forward.

Dream knows that if it comes down to tug of war, he could probably just toss George over his shoulder and walk them back to the car. He doubts that it’ll make George very happy though.

“You’re the one who’s always telling me I have no personality,” George goads. “Come on, then. Let’s do something different.”

“You don’t have to prove that to me, and I was just saying that to piss you off. George, you’re great, I—”

George lets go of his arm and starts towards the wooden gates. He pushes himself off the ground, and then swings a leg over. He lands on both feet and dusts the sides of his pants off, looking to Dream expectantly.

Dream reluctantly follows and copies his movements.

“Was that so hard?” George asks, finally smiling.

Dream rolls his eyes. “No. I don’t even want to see the stupid mountain anymore.”

“Yes you do,” George says, and Dream watches as he steps forward.

He stays in place and folds his arms, waiting for George to notice he’s not following. When George does, he stomps back, takes Dream’s hand, and starts towards the mountain.

When they get to the base, George props his phone against a rock so that they can get a picture together. He stands on his tippy toes, trying to match Dream’s height. Dream grins down at him, hands in his pockets.

He hears the camera click and he thinks that everything is perfect. He opens his mouth to speak, and George stares at him expectantly.

I want to be with you.

“For the shrine you’ll make for me in college,” Dream says instead.

They get lunch in the same restaurant as yesterday. George insists it for convenience and also because the only other one open is a seafood place and he hates seafood.

Bastard. Dream likes seafood.

They weather through burgers stacked three patties tall, and Dream orders them milkshakes behind his back.

“You didn’t have to,” George says, but he takes it without further protesting. “We could’ve gone back to the light show and pretended to kiss again for another one.”

Dream snorts. “That would be very dishonest.”

“My bad,” George says, inspecting the straw before he takes a sip. “What is this?”

“You gotta guess,” Dream tells him.

One of the other customers bumps into a waitress. Dream and George watch as the cheese platter she’s carrying drops to the floor and the plate shatters.

“Ouch,” George winces.

Another two people rush over to help her but she waves them away, pulling out a caution sign and propping it up against the side of a nearby booth.

“I used to wait tables at Billiards,” George says wistfully before frowning. “It feels so long ago, but it wasn’t.”

“We used to go there sometimes, me and the boys,” Dream says, leaning back into his seat. “I never saw you.”

“I avoided you on purpose,” George states, stealing another glance at the glass on the floor, which two employees were working furiously to sweep.

“Should we help?” Dream asks, but George shakes his head no.

“We’d be more irritating than helpful.”

Dream notices there’s a jukebox sitting in the corner, flashing orange and blue. He didn’t see that there yesterday. To be fair, he wasn’t paying attention to much other than George yesterday.

“This is cherry vanilla,” George declares victoriously.

“No way, how’d you even guess that?” Dream asks, staring at him in disbelief.

George lifts the straw from the glass and flicks the end at Dream, sending a drop of the milkshake flying through the air. It lands on his cheek. George reaches out with his thumb to wipe it and Dream leans forward.

He should tell him.

Dream grabs at George’s wrist and smiles mischievously instead. “I’m gonna lick it off your finger.”

“Ew, no, gross,” George yelps, flailing his hand around in an attempt to smack Dream away. “Just take a sip like a normal person.”

Dream lets go and slides George his milkshake, and George slides him the cherry vanilla.

“This is butterscotch,” George declares. “I know it is.”

“Two for two,” Dream says, raising his eyebrows. “I’m impressed.”

“Wanna know a secret?” George asks, leaning forward again.

Dream nods. George points to the large menu printed at the front.

“I just matched the colour of the cup to the flavour. I didn’t know what cherry vanilla was until today.”

Of course. What a cheat.

“But you’re colourblind!” Dream protests. “That’s not fair. I didn’t know you could do that.”

“Well yeah, but it speeds up the process of elimination. It tastes like cherry and vanilla too, if that makes you feel better.”

George looks ridiculously smug, and then he grins for real. Dream loses his breath for a moment.



They get kicked out of the motel room because Dream forgot to extend their stay by one more night. George has gone to the car to get his phone, and Dream has three minutes to fix this.

“Please,” Dream tries. “There’s got to— even if there’s a room with only one bed left. We’ll take it.”

The receptionist looks at him sadly. “I’m sorry sir, I’m afraid we’re all booked until January seventh.”

Dream sighs and walks to the wooden chairs in the waiting area. He looks up other closeby hotels when George appears next to him.

“What’s wrong?”

“I forgot to extend our stay to two nights,” Dream tells him apologetically. “But it’s okay, I can get us somewhere else. There’s gotta be somewhere that has space.”

“Dream,” George starts. “It’s all good. Maybe we should head back a night early. There’s a lot of stuff we can do closer to the school as well.”

Dream shakes his head no. “This has already been more of a disaster than I thought it would be, I don’t want to—”

“This wasn’t a disaster,” George says quietly, hand migrating to his back. “I thought we had a lot of fun.”

“I botched it,” Dream states matter of factly. “You don’t have to lie to spare my feelings.”

“Since when have I given a fuck about sparing your feelings?” George jokes, but Dream just continues to scroll through motels in the area. “Dream, let’s go home. It’s alright.”

Dream feels like he’s eight years old again, trying to explain his feelings. He knows logically that it’s alright to cut their trip short. He knows that they’ll probably be able to do more things back in Oregon. But it’s the principle of the thing.

He doesn’t want George to spend Christmas in a fucking car. It looks like it doesn’t matter what he

wants, because that's what ends up happening.

George turns on the radio, and they sit in silence as the music plays.

"I really liked your Edgewood joke," George says quietly. "I don't feel like I appreciated it enough."

Dream laughs a little. "Maybe next time I'll actually research the area more before I drag us there."

"You didn't drag me," George says. "I was a willing participant."

Dream supposes he was. He doesn't want to spend the last few hours sulking. They had a really good time. Sure, there were hiccups. But maybe he can spin that into how it's representative of him and George's relationship or something when they look back on it.

"What do you think those people were arguing about in the morning?" George asks, digging around for a charger cable.

"Divorce," Dream says without missing a beat.

George gasps. "That's so mean!"

"Yeah? What were you thinking?" Dream asks, stealing a glance in his direction.

"Someone got fired," George says matter of factly. "And now they're in financial ruins."

"That is not better than what I said at all," Dream tells him.

"Okay, okay. They were arguing over who loves the other person more," George says back. "Does that sound nice enough?"

Dream rolls his eyes. "You're such an idiot."

Tell him.

He doesn't.

When they get back to school, Dream hands George their bags and promises he'll be up in just a moment. As soon as he's out of sight, he calls Sapnap.

It goes to voicemail.

He calls again, and Sapnap picks up this time.

"Hello?"

"Dude," Dream starts. "I have like, a thing for George."

"We know," Sapnap says. "So did you tell him?"

Even though Sapnap is the one that technically planted the idea in his head in the first place, Dream is a little offended.

"No, because I just figured it out," Dream says. "And we just took a trip together and got home. I want to tell him, but I don't want to make it weird."

Sapnap whistles. "Vacationing together on Christmas? What else did you do?"

“This is not the point,” Dream says urgently. “I need to do something. Or I’ll end up telling him in a way that’s really inappropriate.” He pauses. “And I met his family. They’re really nice.”

Sapnap sighs. “Dude, there’s two things you have to do, and it’s pretty hard to mess up. Just make sure you tell him at a time where there’s an opportunity for the both of you to take space if you need it, and make sure to have a full conversation.”

Dream nods even though Sapnap can’t see him.

“Dream, I need you to pay attention to the second part. Have a full conversation. I know the both of you struggle with that,” Sapnap pronounces carefully.

“Okay,” Dream says, nodding again.

His heart thunders around in his chest.

When he gets off the phone and gets to the dorm, he opens it to see George in the process of making his bed.

“Hey,” George says, shaking out his pillow. “I was thinking about how—”

“George,” Dream cuts him off.

What the fuck is he doing? This is as good of a time as any, right? And there’s got to be a chance George feels the same way. Maybe. Does he? Dream has no idea.

“What’s up Dream?” George asks, sitting down on his bed.

He should absolutely not tell him right now. He feels like he’s going to be sick.

“I really— I have feelings for you,” Dream manages to spit out.

Chapter End Notes

hello :) i wrote and proofreaded this on my phone and won’t take responsibility for typos. thank you all very much for reading <3 would love to know your thoughts in the comments and see you all soon!

ALSO: I have started a playlist for this fic incase you were curious - do not read into the lyrics it’s moreso vibes-based for lack of better phrasing.

[PLAYLIST](#)

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's an impulsive decision. It's less than ideal of a time. He's had plenty of opportunities to tell George in much nicer places, but he's standing in the doorway of the room they've fought in a million times making a half-assed attempt at a confession because Dream has zero self restraint.

George stares at him blankly for a moment, before his eyebrows furrow. "What?"

Neutral is bad. If George reacted violently opposed to the idea, he could've played it off as a joke. If he had been excited by the prospect then maybe it could work out. But instead George is just staring at him, unreadable.

He does the only thing he knows how to do when he fucks up. Turns around to run.

"Stop," George finally says and Dream freezes as he hears footsteps from behind him, before a hand takes his wrist and gently pulls him back into the room.

"We don't have to talk about it," Dream mutters.

"Yes we do," George says firmly, pushing him towards the edge of his bed. "Sit down for a moment, okay? I'm almost done. Then we'll talk."

Something about this hurts Dream's feelings. "You'd rather do chores than talk to me right now?"

George looks at him, exasperated. "No. But I think you need a moment to collect your thoughts."

Dream feels his shoulders un-tense. "Okay."

He focuses on staring at the wall in front of him. He's unaware he's shaking the bed with his leg until George puts a hand on his thigh, requesting him to stop.

"Dream," George says softly. "I just need a moment, okay? Then we'll talk about it. But, seriously, don't like, overthink anything. I think what I'm going to say, or try to say is— I think it's good. For both of us."

Dream nods as he tries to decipher what that means. It's good for both of them, which means that both of them will be happy. If George thinks Dream's confession can catalyze that, then that means — he doesn't want to think about it in case he's wrong.

"Do you like me?" he ends up blurting out before cringing. "Fuck, I mean— actually, yeah, that's exactly what I mean."

"Very eloquent phrasing," George tells him as he finally finishes clearing the sweaters from his bed. "You should consider going into public speaking."

Dream scoffs. "That's not a field, idiot."

He hasn't said no. He hasn't said yes.

"I used to like you in freshman year," George admits. "Like, at the very beginning. I thought you were cute. You turned out to be a dickhead though."

“D’you still think I’m cute?” Dream asks with a grin, confidence returning as George turns pink.

He watches as George sits cross-legged on the bed in front of him so they can look at each other as they speak.

“Cute is subjective,” George states.

“Okay, but how do I do in your eyes?”

George turns his head to the side as the blush on his cheeks darkens. “You do alright.”

Oh. *Oh.*

“You like me too,” Dream carefully tries.

George shoves him back gently. “Don’t say it like that!”

“Like what?” Dream asks, leaning forward. “Like I like you?”

George crosses his arms as he looks at Dream. “Yeah.”

“But you do,” Dream says with a grin, leaning forward to watch George turn away. “You like me too.”

“Yeah,” George admits. “You got me there.”

Dream’s heart hammers around inside of his chest as his mind tries to get up to speed with what’s happening. George likes him too.

Thank God. The adrenaline has worn off at this point, and the realization of what kind of disaster could have taken place if George didn’t like him back has finally set in. For fuck’s sake, they share a room together. How would that even go?

“So,” Dream says as he watches George pull his sleeves over his hands. “What do you like about me?”

George groans. “Are you serious right now?”

“I’m just asking!” Dream says as he puts his hands up in surrender. “We’ve hated each other for a long time, in case you forgot!”

“I haven’t forgotten,” George huffed. “Going back to doing that is looking really appealing right now, actually.”

“You don’t mean that,” Dream says gleefully. “You like me!”

“You just burst into the room to confess your feelings for me!” George shouts back, but he’s smiling too. “So where’d it start? What was it?”

“You tell me first,” Dream insists, crossing his arms. “I asked first.”

“You told me you liked me first,” George argues back.

“George, c’mon,” Dream says. “I’ll give you a kiss if you tell me.”

“Gross,” George says, shifting further away from Dream on the bed. “I’ll only tell you if you agree

to *not* kiss me.”

“You drive a hard bargain,” Dream sighs. “But tell me.”

“By the mountain,” George admits. “I think I— I don’t know. I figured it out when we were there.”

Dream nods, heart fluttering in his chest. He’s giddy with excitement. George likes him.

“I figured it out while we were fucking around after building,” Dream says. “It was just— it was nice.”

George nods as he bites back a smile. Dream’s eyes flicker over to his letterman jacket, lying at the foot of George’s bed.

“I’ll give it back as soon as I wash it,” George promises.

“Don’t,” Dream says loudly before clearing his throat. “I mean— I have another one. And it looks good on you.”

“I couldn’t,” George insists, leaning over to grab it from behind Dream.

George shakes it out carefully before draping it over Dream’s shoulders. Dream watches as George straightens it out, still painfully red, before sitting back.

“You’re so bad at this,” Dream says out loud with a laugh. “Like, so bad.”

“Bad at what?” George asks indignantly as he grabs a pillow and holds it to his chest. “I think I’m doing great considering you tried to run out the door after telling me!”

Dream sighs exaggeratedly before he takes the pillow from George’s arms and tosses it to the side. George glares at him.

“Now what?” Dream asks, shifting so that he’s sitting right next to George.

“I dunno,” George admits as he shifts closer.

They’re sitting against each other now, and Dream wonders what the appropriate line of action for this is going forward.

“I can’t believe you’re good at the shit you’re good at sometimes,” George thinks aloud. “You never think shit through.”

“Wow, thanks George,” Dream says back sarcastically.

“Let me finish,” George tells him as he puts his head on Dream’s shoulder. “I like that about you.”

A beat. Dream moves his arm so George can sit even closer. “Go on.”

He expects George to make a snarky remark on how of course Dream would want him to go on, and stroke his ego, or whatever, but George surprises him.

“You do things you want to do,” George says. “You’re really passionate. And it inspires me. You make decisions for yourself. The aftermath and follow through is sometimes questionable—”

Dream tilts his head to look at him, and sure enough, George is giving him a pointed look. It’s softer than he remembers it being— corners of George’s mouth turned upwards into a smile.

“—But I admire that about you,” George finishes.

“George,” Dream starts, his voice coming out softer than how he means for it to.

He searches for something else to say in response to that. He doesn’t know what he could even say; nobody’s ever said anything like that to him. He could call George a sop just to watch him get embarrassed. He could say something equally as nicely worded and sincere. His mind blanks, so he settles for knocking his nose against the top of George’s head as an attempt at some sort of affectionate peck.

Fuck. Why’d he do that?

“Do we— so what does this mean?” Dream asks, his hand moving of its own accord to hover over George’s.

“I dunno,” George murmurs as his palm opens up further.

Dream takes George’s hand in his and squeezes it.

“Your work ethic inspires me,” Dream finally says. “But that’s not the reason I like you.”

“Why *do* you like me then?” George asks, moving closer.

Dream feels him exhale, cold air tickling his neck. “I like the way you get excited about things.”

George waits for him to continue.

“It’s like— I can’t even explain it. But you see something great— you make something great out of stuff I wouldn’t have looked at twice. I think it’s like— I like being around you,” Dream settles on finishing.

George smiles as he moves his head from Dream’s shoulder. He goes to move his hand from Dream’s, but Dream grips it tighter.

“Let go, idiot,” George says fondly, pulling his hand away from Dream.

“No,” Dream says back. “Stay here.”

George obliges, to Dream’s surprise, with no protest. George adjusts himself so that he can rest his head on Dream’s chest, pressing his cheek against the fabric of his shirt.

They sit there in silence for a little longer before George finally speaks.

“I wanna shower,” he says. “Don’t try and run away this time.”

“I wasn’t,” Dream insists. “I was just excusing myself from the situation.”

George rolls his eyes as he’s finally released from Dream’s arms. “Okay. See you in twenty minutes.”

Dream watches as George closes the bathroom door. What now?

He wants to be with George. He admits it to himself in words for the first time. They’ve only got a little longer— the first semester is practically done. After they graduate, they’ll both leave Pine Hill. Dream doesn’t even know where he’s going. He doesn’t even know where George is going.

What if George goes back home?

His heart twists painfully in his chest and he kicks himself for not figuring it out earlier, for not getting to know George earlier, for everything. He picks at the pilled material on one of George's pillows as he thinks. There isn't too much of it— George takes care of his things.

George emerges, towel slung over his shoulder. "Hello."

"Hello," Dream echoes.

George makes his way back to the bed and Dream leans back against the pillow and opens his arms. George hesitantly climbs back in with him.

"I was thinking," Dream starts.

"That's a first," George mutters before pausing. "Sorry."

"You're not," Dream says. "You're not sorry."

"I'm not sorry," George agrees. "But what were you thinking about?"

A pause. "Graduating."

George sighs. "Yeah. That's happening."

"What do we— can we even get together? If we wanted to? Because we don't have that much time," Dream says.

It's a shitty thing to do. Put things that matter on a timer. It's worse because he knows that things are bound to be different a year from now. A year from now they won't care about any of this. They'll both be off to school, and they'll forget how much this matters.

It matters a lot to Dream right now.

"Who says we don't have time?" George asks. "We've got plenty of time."

"I don't want to like— I don't see a point in half assing a relationship," Dream starts. "I just— I don't wanna get together to break up."

"We don't have to do that," George says quietly. "We can just try."

Dream falls silent at that.

"If you want," George adds. "Nothing can change at all if you don't want it to."

Dream laughs at the absurdity of that. "If I didn't want anything to change I wouldn't have told you."

George looks at him, and his eyes flicker down for a moment, before they meet Dream's again. Dream finds himself leaning forward, forward, before George closes the gap between the two of them.

He feels two hands grab his shoulders and he's pushed onto his back. George laughs against his lips and Dream laughs because he's laughing.

"Sorry," George sheepishly tells him as he collapses on top of Dream again. "Lost my balance."

“Sure you did,” Dream grumbles, but he wraps his arms around George and doesn’t let him get back up.

There’s a lot to worry about. Unanswered emails and future competitions to attend, interviews and campuses to scout out, questions Sapnap will ask that he’ll have to eventually answer, his parents when they find out he’s dating boys again.

He doesn’t want to think about that right now. Emails can wait and time will pass, he’ll be able to talk to an interviewer just fine, college campuses all look the fucking same anyways, Sapnap will wait, and his parents will have to wait too.

He doesn’t want to think about what they’ll say. He’s not asking George to keep their relationship a secret, and he knows that someone will mention it to someone else, and then they’ll mention it to their parents, who will tell Dream’s.

They’ll fly out and his father will act cold and his mother will blow it out of proportion and the summer before college will be all ruined.

So he doesn’t think about it any further. He focuses on the way George feels next to him, his hair tickling Dream’s chin.

“I can’t believe you were going to run away,” George says. “Have we learnt nothing from this year?”

“I wasn’t thinking,” Dream defends himself.

“You’re never thinking,” George retorts.

“You like that though, you said it yourself,” Dream says back, rolling over so that George is laying beside him. “You like that I’m passionate and hot.”

“I never said that,” George scoffs, still smiling.

Dream presses his hands against George’s cheeks and kisses him again. “Liar.”

“You liked me first,” George reminds him.

“You liked me in freshman year!” Dream says back. “That’s a lot longer.”

“I didn’t like you, I thought you were cute and then you opened your mouth,” George bites back. “Get it right.”

“*Get it right*,” Dream mocks in a high pitched voice. “*I ’m George, and I’m better than everyone else.*”

“I am,” George says seriously, before smiling again, and Dream cups his cheek as he kisses him again.

George laughs and buries his face in Dream’s neck. Dream hears his phone buzz and groans as he goes to check it.

8 Unread Messages from Sapnap

Sapnap: Dude

Sapnap: did you do it

Sapnap: how'd it go

Sapnap: did you do it

Sapnap: i bet you're both going to be even worse

Sapnap: you're insufferable when you hate each other

Sapnap: now you'll both be actively seeking each other out

George glances over his shoulder and Dream tilts the screen to show him the messages.

"I called him and asked for advice before telling you," Dream admits.

"Did he tell you to yell it at me and run away?" George asks, gently taking the phone from his hands and typing out a response.

"Haha, very funny," Dream says sarcastically as he watches over George's shoulder to see what he says.

Dream: he rejected me and kicked me out of our dorm room

Dream: i have nowhere to go

Dream: i am going to live in your room until you get back you have good shampoo

"He's gonna freak out," Dream tells George, and sure enough, his ringtone goes off as Sapnap's name pops up on the phone's screen. "I'm not picking up."

"That's so mean," George says, but he sets Dream's phone aside and doesn't make an effort to contest his decision.

"I'll call him back," Dream promises. "Later."

George lays back down and pulls Dream in. "Aren't you tired from driving?"

"No," Dream says. "But I'll sleep if you want to sleep."

"Merry Christmas," George says, dipping down to press a kiss to Dream's cheek shyly.

"Merry Christmas," Dream repeats.

Dream closes his eyes as George runs his fingers through his hair. Everything else could wait.

awwww they did it!!

refraining from leaving a huge emotional rant because that's gross and i will save it for the END end notes at the end of the next chapter.

i might do a one shot aside from the series after the final chapter goes up - feel free to user sub or follow me on twitter for updates on that LMFAO [twitter @angelbeachcat](#)
thank you so much for reading, love seeing your thoughts in the comments, and see you in the next one :) <3 (that's the last time i get to say that here wtf)

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The best thing about dating George is that he pushes him to be better, because they're both still dangerously competitive. If Dream is better at something, George will work to match his ability, and vice versa. It's nice because it's like having a built-in cheerleader. They make each other better when they want to be. The problem is when both of them are bad at something, because they enable each other to give up.

They learn that moving furniture is neither of their forte.

"C'mon Dream, aren't you a football player?"

Dream groans and tosses his head back. "It's harder than it looks, I can't wrap my hands around the bed frame."

George looks around their shared room, which has become a bit of a mess in the past few days, and sighs. "This is stupid."

"We don't need to move the beds together," Dream reminds him. "We fit on one just fine."

"No we don't," George says matter of factly. "You take up too much space."

They've been trying to figure out how to push their beds together and rearrange the rest of the things in their room to optimize their space, but they're facing a bit of difficulty.

"Do you really need *four* baseball bats?" George asks as he crosses his arms. "You don't even play!"

"I do," Dream says defensively. "And they can fit underneath the bed, I don't understand why we have to get rid of them!"

"We have to get rid of something!" George exclaims as he tosses his hands in the air, exasperated. "There's not enough space to pull the beds apart if the administrators try to come in and check on us."

Dream sighs in resignation. "Fine. I'll ask Sapnap if he's willing to keep the bats in his room."

George grins victoriously as he goes to pick up the bed frame again. "Okay, let's try putting it horizontally."

"We already tried that," Dream complains. "Let's take a break."

"No," George says matter of factly. "We took two breaks already, and I want to take a nap. Let's try it one more time."

It takes all of Dream's willpower to comply without whining. Sure enough, George is right. They manage to fit the bed into the corner by the window next to the other one.

"Now I can roll over and wake up to you every single morning *without* your elbow in my neck," Dream says pointedly.

George rolls his eyes and hits Dream in the arm. “We would have been done twenty minutes ago if you’d just listened to me the first time I said we should do it like this!”

“No, you wanted to put the—”

George cuts him off with a quick kiss and Dream loses his train of thought immediately.

“Wish we were dating during the debates,” George sighs. “It would’ve made my life a lot easier.”

“Why?” Dream asks, dropping himself onto the bed. “Need a handicap to beat me?”

“No, it would just be nice to get you to shut up for once,” George says back, sitting next to him.

Dream looks out the window and winces at the intensity of the sun. He feels George shift on the bed before he wraps his arms around Dream and pulls him in. Dream obliges with him, and adjusts himself so that his head is propped up on George’s shoulder.

“I don’t mean that,” George admits, breaking the silence. “I like listening to you talk.”

George has a habit of doing that, he’s noticed. He still takes jabs at Dream whenever he can, but reminds Dream that he doesn’t really mean it. Dream knows and tells George he doesn’t have to, but George is adamant.

It’s very sweet. George is very sweet. His boyfriend, George, is very sweet.

Dream smiles against George’s shoulder. “Knew it.”

They’ve slipped into a nice routine; studying together in the afternoons, robotics in the evenings.

“I think I’m going to ask for a job at Billiards again,” George says out loud.

Dream looks at him with confusion and concern. “Why? Is everything alright?”

“Everything is fine,” George reassures him. “It’s all going good, but I’ve got to start saving. If I want to attend university in America.”

Dream processes what George says before breaking into a smile. “You’re staying.”

“I think so,” George tells him, placing a hand on Dream’s cheek. “Still not sure where I’m going though.”

“That’s more than okay,” Dream rushes out to say. “It’s not like— I think if you changed your mind last minute and decided you were going home, that’d be good too. Whatever makes you happy. But obviously I want you close.”

The corners of George’s eyes crinkle as he smiles and looks at him. Dream feels like he’s going to melt. They’re interrupted by loud knocking on the door.

“Open up!” Dream hears Quackity yell.

“Should we?” Dream asks, sitting up straight and looking at George.

George nods. “Probably.”

Dream makes no effort to move. George sighs and gets off the bed and unlocks the door. It slams open. Quackity and Karl waltz in with Sapnap in tow. Sapnap takes one look at the two joint beds

and lets out a noise of disgust.

“You guys are insufferable,” he declares as he sits down. “Seriously. You’ve been together for what, three months, and you’re already doing HGTV style renovations in your dorm room.”

“We just moved the bed!” Dream defends them. “It’s nicer by the window closer to spring.”

They set themselves up on the floor and sit in a circle.

“We still haven’t decided where we’re going tomorrow,” Karl says pointedly, looking at Sapnap and then Quackity. “We’ve got to decide now. Or we aren’t going.”

Sapnap wraps an arm around Karl’s shoulders. “I told you, we should try for Reno.”

“I am not going to sit in a car with you assholes for eight hours to camp in the desert,” Quackity says, folding his arms. “Try somewhere a little closer.”

“Do we even have to go camping? Let’s get a cabin,” Sapnap suggests.

Everyone looks at him in disbelief.

“If you’d agreed on just getting a cabin last week,” Dream starts. “We could have booked it!”

“Well I thought the weather was going to be nice,” Sapnap argues. “How was I supposed to know it was going to rain in all of Northern California tomorrow last week?”

Sapnap and Dream continue bickering as Karl opens up Google Maps.

“Guys!” Karl shouts. “Guys. There’s a simple solution.”

He gestures towards the screen of the laptop, which is focused on the intersection of Oregon, California and Nevada. “Someone closes their eyes and randomly drops a pin, and where it ends up is where we’ll go.”

“Don’t get Sapnap to do it,” Quackity says immediately. “He’ll rig it.”

“I will not,” Sapnap says indignantly. “Who do you think I am, Quackity?”

“I’ll do it,” George interjects, taking the laptop from Karl. He looks at the ceiling and moves the mouse around randomly. “Tell me when to stop.”

It’s silent for a few moments, before Sapnap speaks. “Stop.”

George releases the cursor and looks to where it’s landed. “Rome.”

“How did you end up in Italy?” Quackity asks in disbelief.

Sapnap takes the computer from George. “Rome, *Oregon*, you idiot.”

“We should maybe look up if there’s actually shit to do there,” Dream adds. “It’s not a good idea to just, like, go. We could even— we could just trash the whole camping idea all together and go to San Francisco, or somewhere else in the city.”

They all think for a moment.

“That sounds— are we even going to be able to get a place to stay at this point? It’s so busy right

now,” Quackity says as he types something into his phone.

“The city’s expensive,” Karl tells them. “It’s not worth it for a trip we haven’t even planned properly.”

Everyone halfheartedly mutters in agreement.

“Wait,” Sapnap says. “I think— My parents have a cottage somewhere a few hours from here, let me just—”

He pulls out his phone and steps out of the room. Dream puts his head on George’s lap.

“I told you,” Karl says pointedly. “Quackity was betting on the fact you two would end up together in October.”

“I *knew*, ” Quackity says, pointing at Dream. “All this guy did was talk about you. So obsessed.”

“Aw,” George says, poking his finger into Dream’s cheek. “S’cute.”

“Don’t act like you’re any better,” Karl snorts. “You never shut up about him either.”

Dream reaches up and pinches George’s cheek. “Aw.”

They usually try, for everyone’s sake, to keep their hands off each other in public. Today, Dream thinks that everyone else will just have to tolerate it.

Sapnap barges back into the room grinning victoriously. “Pack your bags, we’re driving down to California tomorrow.”

Sapnap, Quackity, and Karl decide to go finish packing before thy return and figure out the itinerary for what they want to do. When they leave, Dream locks the door and looks back at George.

“If you’re alright with it, and if they’re hiring,” he starts. “I wanna get a job at Billiard’s too. So we can spend time together.”

George looks surprised for a moment. “Oh, that’s— you don’t have to, but if you want to, I wouldn’t mind at all.”

“I want to,” Dream insists, sitting back down next to him. “I wanna spend time with you.”

George laces their fingers together and smiles at him softly. “Okay. I’d like that, actually. A lot.”

Uncertainty seems to be the only constant nowadays. Dream has no fucking clue what he wants to do, George has no fucking idea where he wants to go. Existing outside of a constant state of anxiety has become difficult.

“I told my parents I’ll play football in college,” Dream tells George. “Last night.”

George nods. “Is that what you want?”

Dream sighs. “It’s what I think is the best decision for me to make right now.”

George thinks about this for a moment. “That makes sense.”

He was still unsure about the decision, but he’s already gotten offers from a few schools he likes.

Maybe he doesn't have the vision for it right now. Maybe he'd quit and live to regret it.

It isn't like he can predict the outcome of that.

"I haven't told my parents about us," George admits. "Tilly knows, but my parents don't."

Dream shrugs. "It's alright. We don't need to do all that right now. I haven't told my parents either."

He's managed to keep it a secret. George doesn't care too much for being affectionate around campus, because he's *in the zone*, or whatever. Dream thinks it's infuriatingly adorable. George rolls his eyes when he tells him this.

George nods. "Do you want to take a nap?"

"We have to pack!" Dream tells him. "They're all going to be back in an hour or so."

"An hour is enough time to nap," George insists. "We can pack tonight."

"Or," Dream starts. "We could sleep tonight."

George rolls his eyes but climbs to his feet. Dream watches him walk to his wardrobe and toss a few shirts onto their now shared bed.

"Do we bring swimsuits?" Dream asks. "I don't want to go swimming."

"It's a cottage," George reminds him. "It's probably by the water."

"I think I've forgotten how to swim," Dream says as he walks to his wardrobe too, opening it unceremoniously.

George laughs as he pulls a hoodie out. "Should we— oh, wait, I forgot to show you!"

Dream watches him rush over to the bedside table and pull the drawer open. He holds up what looks like a stack of cards. Dream steps closer, squinting to see what they are.

"It's the photos from our Christmas trip," George says excitedly. "I got them printed on polaroid paper."

He holds one up for Dream to take. It's a picture of the two of them at the diner. Dream's arm stretches out from the corner. George is sitting in the seat across from him, letterman jacket pulled over his shoulders, looking at Dream with exasperation. A smile tugs at the corners of his lips. Dream is grinning from ear to ear.

"For your shrine?" Dream asks.

"Yeah," George says back. "That trip was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed the part where you burst in and told me you liked me."

"You can't make fun of me for that," Dream grumbles. "It's the reason we're even together."

George contemplates this for a moment. "No, I can definitely still make fun of you for it."

"I can't believe you— that little stunt you pulled at the mistletoe," Dream says, pointing an accusatory finger. "That was so—"

“You didn’t seem to have a complaint,” George laughs. “You’re still the same.”

“What do you mean, the same?” Dream asks, puffing his chest threateningly.

George laughs again. “You can dish it out, but you can’t take it.”

Dream feels George pinch the front of his shirt and pull him down to plant a kiss on his nose.

“You missed,” Dream tells him pointedly. “Try again.”

George rolls his eyes, but he’s smiling as he wraps his arms around Dream’s neck and pulls him closer to kiss him properly.

Dream pushes him backwards but loses his balance and ends up falling on top of him.

“Get off, get off!” George screams, as he tries to pull Dream away.

“Not unless you kiss me again,” Dream whispers, stealing one off George’s cupid’s bow.

There is forever to be worried about bigger, more important things. He could be upset that time won’t stop for him and George to properly enjoy their time together as kids, he could be stressed about the conditions of his sports scholarship for next year, he could spiral back into a pit of despair over how he feels so clueless in all of this.

He thinks that things will end up working out anyways. He thought the world was going to end when he got benched for a single practice. He thought the world was going to end when he didn’t get to live next to Sapnap in the Ivory Towers.

It’s all worked out more than fine, in his opinion. He’s eradicated an enemy and landed himself a boyfriend.

George has walked back towards his desk in the time Dream has spent contemplating, and found a spare gear from the last robotics competition. “Remember when we thought we forgot to put this in the motor and we freaked out just to find out it was a spare?” George laughs as he examines the teeth on it. “That was— we’re so dumb sometimes.”

We are, Dream thinks. But it’s okay. I like that about us.

George looks at him and for a stupid moment Dream thinks he can read his mind. George’s eyes say *I like that about us too*.

Dream looks at George and smiles fondly. He’s *so fucking glad* he forgot to fill out that room request form.

Chapter End Notes

okay what the fuck it's over.

kind of feeling grossly sentimental about it tbh. what is up with that.

this was my first fic for a larger fandom on ao3 at least and i did NOT expect so many people to read it (i know i say this a million times but i need people to know that i went into this blindly). kind of go into shock every time i see the number. seriously wtf thank you all for reading. if i am being completely honest i started this to just try my

hand at a bunch of tropey shit and get it out of my system but i'm so happy to see so many other people enjoy it :)

some people have figured it out already and i've been hooting and hollering about this to anyone who will listen to me but the school name itself is a pun. pine hill bc they pine after each other and they die on stupid ass hills. what a fucking rip off

thank you to all of you for reading and commenting and being so nice :) it's just insane to me that people take time out of their days to look at what i write.

i may do a one shot of dream and george in college sometime in the future - if you're interested in keeping up with that i've put the work into a series you can sub to (or you could user sub if you have like, a crush on me or something haha).

thank you all for reading and commenting! even if you've been a silent reader i appreciate u a lot. come say hi in the comments if you want i think i'm pretty approachable.

i'll be writing for the dnf tag for quite a bit still lol - i do have a handful of other stories up and i don't particularly have a niche so feel free to browse - also just put up chapter 1 of another sfw thing it probably won't be as long as this but it's a superhero au and it is just me fucking around so yeah if you would like to check that out i'll see you there!

thank you all so much for reading :) hope to see you around!!

- angelbeachcat <3

ALSO: there is art what the FUCK?!!!!!:)) please go drop a like and say something nice if you have the time

ART LINK [CLICK ME](#)

epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The summer before the world ends seems like a bit of an exaggeration, but George can't think of any other combination of words that completely encapsulates how it feels.

It hardly seems fair. After spending forever working himself into oblivion and avoiding finding anything that would make letting go of this place too hard, he had to go and undo all of that in the final stretch. It's worse than anything, and he'd avoided it because he knows himself. He knows he's going to tear himself to pieces over the inevitable end, where they all go their separate ways and see each other once every other holiday.

Dream listens to him talk through it over and over.

"It's hard," George justifies. "It's just- okay, I think I've already said this twice, but it's going to be so weird."

Dream nods, and George thinks that he must think he's crazy. Still, he reaches out and grabs his hand, giving it a gentle squeeze.

"I don't- it's so difficult," George continues. "We used- I'm so used to living next to you, and now we're going to be so far away."

"Not that far," Dream starts. "Just- it's only a little far."

"Yeah, it's only two thousand and four hundred miles," George says sarcastically.

"Two thousand, four hundred and thirty one," Dream corrects, leaning forward to plant a kiss on his nose. "And my parents are in California, so I'll be there for every long weekend and every single break."

"Yeah, but I might go *home* home for some of the breaks," George argues.

"Okay, then I'll go with you," Dream says, like it's the most obvious answer in the world.

They're currently sitting in the empty dorm room, things all packed away into suitcases. They'll be off for a little trip, just the two of them to Las Vegas, before George flies back to the UK. The next time he gets here, he'll land in California, and he'll be doing it as a UCLA student. Dream will be all the way in Florida, starting his freshman year there.

"I just-- but it's not the same," George finishes with a sigh, fully aware of how he's dampened the mood at this point.

George knows how high school relationships end; they'll talk on the phone and compromise for each other, then they'll argue and decide to take a break, and desperately attempt to stay friends, and then they'll never speak again. And one day he won't care. He'll move on, move past it, and Dream will just become a fond memory, assuming they don't blow up at each other.

He doesn't want that.

There's something about that desire that makes him feel incredibly childish. He knows that the two

of them will make it, but he also knows that's what everyone says.

"George," Dream says, patient as always. "Is there something on your mind?"

Dream is asking even though he knows exactly what's on George's mind. George hasn't shut the fuck up about it for weeks.

"I'm just scared," George says again. "I just- I don't want to make a mess of all this, because I know-"

"We won't," Dream says with such confidence that George feels guilty for having doubts about it in the first place. "I'm sure of it."

"I'm just used to having you around all the time," George sighs, as the two of them finally decide to start walking their things down to the car.

The rest of the year flew by so quickly. From graduation pictures, to last dances, to prom. Him, Dream, Quackity, Karl, and Sapnap had done all of it together, and George didn't understand how he was meant to say goodbye without turning into a wreck.

Everyone else seemed so fine.

"You'll have me, you'll have everyone," Dream reassures. "We're all going all over the place, and you know how it is with football. We'll be playing your school at some point, so I'll see you then."

George sighs. "Sorry to be a pessimist about all of it."

Dream thinks for a moment, before taking George's suitcase from him and putting it in the trunk of the car. "Okay, let's think worst case scenario."

"No, I don't mean-"

"It's okay," Dream reassures. "Let's think about it. Say we break up."

"I don't want to break up," George says.

"That's a relief," Dream sighs, before grinning at him. "Okay, so we don't have to deal with that yet. What's the problem?"

George's shoulders slump.

"I think you're ruining a good thing for yourself," Dream tells him matter of factly before motioning for George to get inside the car. "It's- it will be different. I'm a little scared too. But I think we can do it. And if we can't, we can always put this on pause, and we can restart when we graduate. But I don't think we'll have to."

"Yeah?" George asks, biting back a smile as Dream turns to him from the driver's seat, taking George's hand between both of his.

"Yeah," Dream says, seriously this time. "After all of this, I don't think I can let you go. I think this is a forever thing."

"Dream," George starts, eyes immediately darting towards the gear stick, cheeks burning. "You can't say things like that."

"Why?" Dream pushes, leaning forward.

“Because it’s embarrassing,” George groans.

“Look, I know you’re worried, because people are always saying-”

“I don’t care what people say,” George states. “I just- I don’t know. I worry.”

“You do,” Dream says back, but it’s fond. “That’s alright though. We’ll just have to have so much fun that you forget.”

When Dream starts the car to pull out of the parking lot, away from Pine Hill, away from where they fell in love, George feels something melancholy bite at the inside of his heart. They turn onto the road, and he turns around to watch the highest tower melt into the background, an anticlimactic ending to the thing he had been dreading for so long. When he turns back around, he sees that Dream is crying.

“Dream,” George starts gently, thumb brushing against his cheek to wipe away a tear. “It’s okay.”

Dream swallowed thickly before he nodded. “Yeah. I know, it’s okay.”

The car is silent for a little as they continue along the winding roads.

“Still stings like a bitch though,” George tries.

Dream lets out a short laugh.

It technically isn't even goodbye. That was their excuse to not get emotional during graduation, because the rest of their friends said they'd meet them in Vegas for the last two days. Everyone that matters is still here.

George wasted so much time working himself up over the future. He’s doing it again, sitting in the passenger seat of the car next to Dream, sulking about the future when they’re right next to each other right now.

“There’s a lot we can do in Vegas,” George starts, tearing through the silence. “I’m excited to get through the list.”

Dream turns to him and smiles. “Yeah.”

“I’m glad we planned,” George continues. “It’s something we really need to work on.”

Dream groans as he throws his head back. “Okay, give me a break-”

“-I didn’t say it was just you!”

“But you were thinking it!”

George doesn’t have a response for that, so he waits until the next red light to give Dream a quick kiss on the cheek as an apology.

“You missed,” Dream says pointedly, but George swats his arm.

“Look at the road.”

George fiddles with the radio as Dream drives. He rolls open a window and breathes in as he closes his eyes for a moment.

“Are you tired?” Dream asks, reaching out to put a hand on his shoulder.

George shakes his head no.

“Good,” Dream states with a grin. “We’ve got ten more hours to go.”

They reach a gas station an hour and a half later. George thinks that grabbing a bag of chips and calling it a day constitutes a meal, but Dream insists they wait until they get somewhere nice.

“We should do a sit down dinner, a graduation thing,” Dream justifies. “It’ll be fun!”

“We’re burning daylight though,” George points out. If we want to get to-

“George, c’mon,” Dream whines. “We can drive an hour later than we expected, so what?”

George rolls his eyes as Dream pouts, but pulls out his phone to look for nearby restaurants. They end up at an abomination of an Italian restaurant, but the breadsticks are cheap so they bear with it.

“Are you excited?” Dream asks, smiling softly as he kicks at George’s heel under the table.

“You’re going to be studying what you always wanted to be studying.”

George nods. “Yeah, it’s kind of cool.”

Dream looks at him pointedly.

“Okay, very cool,” George admits, grinning. “Just a lot to take in sometimes. I don’t think I fully even understand what’s going on.”

Dream listened to him ramble about the parts he’s excited about, the parts he’s scared for.

“It’s just weird,” George repeats. “I feel like- I feel like I’ve spent so long wanting it that it doesn’t feel real. You get that?”

Dream nods, smiling tightly. “Yeah.”

George immediately feels like he’s made a mistake. “No, I’m sorry, I don’t mean-”

“No no,” Dream rushes out to say. “I know you don’t mean it like that, seriously. I mean, it’s still cool. I’d be crazy to not be grateful. But y’know me, I won’t know if I like it before I get there and do it.”

Dream had agreed to play football in university. George knew that he didn’t really want to, that his heart wasn’t in it the same way as before. But his parents had insisted, saying he’d regret it if he had passed up on the opportunity.

So here he was.

“I mean, I can’t complain,” Dream laughs. “It’s- a lot of people really want to be where I am. And I still love football, I just don’t want people breathing down my neck as I play it.”

George nods, prompting him to continue.

“I just- I don’t know. I feel like even if I do really enjoy it, a lot more than I anticipate enjoying it,

then I'll feel the need to like- fake hate it? I don't want to give my parents the satisfaction," Dream laughs nervously, stabbing his fork into a breadstick before raising it for inspection. "Oh, look, the cheese on this thing kinda baked to look like a horse."

He holds it up for George to observe.

"It does," George agrees after a moment. "But, y'know. Just because it's someone else's dream--"

Dream grins, George rolls his eyes.

"-doesn't mean it has to be yours."

Dream thinks about this for a moment. "Yeah. Worst comes to worst, I'll like, do four lines of cocaine before a game and get suspended."

"Yeah, great plan," George eggs him on. "I can get it for you, since I'm actually part of a drug ring."

Dream laughs for a moment, before realizing that he's being made fun of. "Okay, not funny."

"It's still funny," George insists, and Dream flicks the tip of the breadstick so that marinara sauce flies across the space between them and lands on George's chin.

They end up at the motel at eleven o'clock. Dream had wanted to just drive the whole night through, but George said they should probably rest.

"Oh man," Dream says as George launches himself to the center of the king size bed. "I'm getting deja vu."

"Are you?" George calls, voice muffled from the pillow for a moment before he rolls over. "From when you were in love with me?"

Dream makes a guffawing sound as he lies down next to him. "You were in love with me too. Didn't you have a crush on me in freshman--"

"Fuck off, fuck off fuck off fuck off," George says, slapping Dream's arm. "You said you wouldn't make fun of me for that."

"Well you said you'd stop making fun of me for thinking you were involved in a drug ring," Dream says, rolling over to look at George.

His hair falls straight across his forehead, and George's eyes follow the lines on his face for a moment. It feels like the world stops spinning for a second, before he flicks his gaze upwards, looking right into Dream's eyes.

"I'm never going to stop," George says matter of factly.

Dream flushes red. "Okay, then I'll never stop either."

It means something more, but they don't have to say it out loud. When Dream climbs into George's arms, they sleep as close together as they can. George feels Dream's ear against his chest, and wonders if he can hear the stutter inside his rib cage that moves in time to the way he breathes.

Even if he doesn't, George knows Dream knows that he loves him anyways.

They wake up early, drive through the morning and reach Vegas in the afternoon.

"I love you," George says as they pass by the sign, reaching out to put his hand over Dream's.
"We're going to make it."

Dream looks over at him and smiles. "I know."

George lets himself indulge this time. It doesn't matter if people call him young, or foolish for wanting something good to last. He has spent too long worrying. This time, he looks at Dream and doesn't try to memorize the way he looks, because he knows he'll have forever to look at him anyways.

The street signs pass them by. They'll pass them a second time on the way back, when Dream drops him off at the airport.

"You pick brunch," Dream tells him. "Since you won the last debate of the year."

"You don't care about that, you just hate choosing," George retorts, and Dream laughs.

"Maybe."

The blood rushes in his ears as Dream turns the radio up, some horrendous country song blasting through the car speakers.

"Turn it off," George complains, but Dream just laughs louder, leans in so their shoulders brush for a moment as he shimmies with the music.

George rolls his eyes, before looking over at Dream, who's shrugging his shoulders in time with the beat, and copies his movements.

Dream looks at him again, all too fondly. "Idiot."

"Just drive," George sighs, but he can't stop himself from smiling.

Chapter End Notes

what. WHAT. WHATTTTTTT i'm here again?? i know, crazy.

george won the last debate because he's so smart and cool go george go.

FIRST OF ALL STOP WHAT U ARE DOING. there is art what the FUCK?!!!!!:))

shoutout 2 lanie ur insane. please go drop a like and say something nice if you have the time it's so swag!

[ART LINK](#)

hope u all liked the epilogue! I said my piece in the end notes last time so I'll stfu.

thank you for the love and support this just hit 3000 kudos which is fucking insane are u kidding. i never thought u guys. this fic literally changed my life i met some of my best friends through it. i am so happy i wrote it :))))

since i put the epilogue in the fic itself i will be deleting the "series" its in - just a heads up

ty for all the love and support <33 see u around !!!

End Notes

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